Masculinism in Twentieth-Century Literature: Dissidence and Dissemblance in André Gide's *The Immoralist,* Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, and Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater*

Amanda Emanuel Smith

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This dissertation is not rooted in assertions about or postulates of masculinity, maleness or manliness, as its title might suggest, but rather in the act of inquiry itself. It asks how certain works whose authors and themes point to a whiteness and maleness, which some within the academy now deem anachronistic and beside the point of literary studies, might be reinterpreted as precursors to queer and feminist theories, approaches to alterity, and explorations into the (postcolonial) eroticization of the foreign. It also asks how Arthur Brittan's "myth of masculinism," based on "an obsession with competition and achievement" and "the myth of the autonomous and independent penis"[1], might account for, or at least help explain, the emergence of the gendered self in the twentieth century and its deconstruction in the twenty-first century. How might certain works, often censured for being pornographic, misogynistic, and even homophobic, actually open the door for meaningful discourse about race, religion, gender and sexuality – the very construction of self? In short, why do these masculinist works continue to matter and to what end should we continue to read and interpret them in our humanities departments?

This project began as a thesis in Heidelberg, Germany. The purport of that exploration was to include a theory, or theories, that would neither condemn nor condone the perverseness, misogyny or machismo so often criticized in Philip Roth's work and to instead pinpoint the sexual morality from which his characters brazenly deviate and identify the underlying social structures meant to keep human behavior, and perhaps even human nature, in check. It also endeavored to uncover the potential psychological effects of such control, or "containment,"[2] on some of Roth's more wanton protagonists, including David Kapesh and Mickey Sabbath. To accomplish this, the thesis hoped to establish a lens for reading writers whose work compare to Roth's thematically. In essence, it

[1] Brittan, Arthur. *Masculinity and Power.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1989. Pg. 4, 16.
[2] Cf. Theories of Subversion and Containment in New Historicism, especially: Greenblatt, Stephen. "Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and its Subversion." *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism.* Eds. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985.

attempted to locate, if not construct, a working theoretical apparatus for analyzing sexual conformity and dissidence in the characters of writers like Roth.

Ultimately, the thesis, "Eros and Mortality in the Works of Philip Roth," accomplished part of what it was meant to: it neither condemned nor condoned the perverseness, misogyny or machismo so often denounced in Roth's work. It also integrated a theoretical apparatus conducive to reading not only Roth's oeuvre, but those of thematically comparable writers. The apparatus was both explicitly Freudian and relentlessly self-critical. It did build bridges between masculinist writers and works, however tenuous those bridges would eventually prove to be, but it also exposed the precariousness of the foundation it so wanted to establish. While the thesis could relate Roth to other writers, it fell short of defining what masculinism as a literary mode (rather than mere cultural myth) might be or how it might work.

It examined Roth and drew connections to D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce, both of whom were obvious choices, but neither of whom fully embodied the working theory it hoped would eventually, miraculously, materialize. It analyzed Roth largely through Herbert Marcuse's comprehensive (and deservedly lauded) study, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry Into Freud*, drawing literary correlations to Freudian concepts such as the Oedipal Complex, the cultural sublimation of the instincts, and civilization's monopolization of time. It argued that Kapesh and Sabbath were driven by the pleasure principle and that their obstinate negation of reality had cost them meaningful relationships and mental stability. They were outsiders, it insisted, of a system that prescribed heterosexual monogamy and proscribed polymorphous perversity. Essentially, the analysis made one sweeping claim: Roth's characters, like those of Lawrence and Joyce, exist in self-made (anti-)social structures beyond the decided morality of their time and milieu. They are individualists. *isolatos,* who are utterly, and often irrationally, committed to gratification and decidedly adverse to (sexual) conformity.

The relationship between individualism and the 'revolution' for (artistic/sexual) authenticity would become apparent through later readings of Saint Augustine, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Oscar Wilde, and Jonathan Dollimore, among others. But one thing, even throughout extended readings and analyses, would remain evident: masculinism, as a literary mode, is irrefutably anarchic.

Although masculinist literature may appear to be about masculinity as such or (often explicit) articulations of male carnality or even *crudeness*, it is actually about the use of masculinity, or *gender performance,* and prurience as rebellion; it is a means to undercut a sexually sublimating, artistically stifling system of values whose primary aim is to erect unseen, virtually undetectable, impediments to freedom. Masculinism is about man shackled by invisible but palpable chains, trying not only to break free, but to be free. At first glance, there is little revelatory in this abbreviated definition; in fact, the very attention given the implied man in masculinism seems overtly patriarchal, dated. But, man first needed to be centered in order to be decentered; masculinism knows this. If the prominence of man seems archaic, it is of course because it is. This is why this definition of masculinism belongs if not *in* then *to* the twentieth century: it is indicative of a timespan that experienced the continued eminence of man with his connotations of strength, virility, and savvy; but, it is also indicative of an era that felt first the rise of woman in particular, then otherness in general. The precariousness of 'man's moment' accounts for the palpable angst of masculinist literature; there is a feeling of being ousted, an impulse to retreat. There is something heroic, on a literary level at least, about the masculinist protagonist's willed isolation. For he, not entirely unlike Homer's Odysseus or even Hesse's Siddhartha, is on a quest. But he seeks neither home nor enlightenment; instead, he seeks that which can never be achieved: autonomy.

This theme, this want of freedom that manifests itself as the timeless rebellion of man against the civilization in which he is embedded (and which he himself envisioned, designed, built), is echoed throughout literature, theory, philosophy. Yet in *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault maintains that "there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary."[3] Perhaps, then, the very idea of a timeless rebellion is a misrepresentation or illusion; perhaps there are as many refusals as there are people. But for a refusal to become or to instigate a rebellion or revolution, it must reconfigure itself, join an alliance. In this way, masculinism can be understood as the conflation of similar disavowals. What differentiates masculinism from other rebellions, however, is the awareness of its own futility. It sees a certain erasure of self in its quest for freedom; in this, the subject that was once 'human,' and the product of 'humanism,' transforms into an aesthetic artifact. 'Man,' in this context, ceases

[3] Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: Vol. I, An Introduction.* Tr. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1978. Pg. 95-96.

to be; instead, it is the idea of him that leads the charge against unfreedom, the revolt against morality. Insofar masculinism appears to be caught up in ideas, even ideals, of masculinity, it is actually the mirror in which masculinity deciphers its own end. Yet, the futility of rebellion and the foreseen dissipation of self does not thwart or even slow the masculinist endeavor for freedom. The shared disavowal of morality, of that which stifles and sublimates, instead regroups within textual frameworks, reinventing 'man' as 'character.'

Transgression, the engine of this nascent man's rebellion, becomes equally aestheticized as nonconformity is identified as proof of both (the masculinist protagonist and his creator's) authenticity and artistry. In *Marxism and Literature,* Raymond Williams sees (potential) transgression as initiatives and contributions to or against a given hegemonic social structure that prove ineffectual not because they never reach fruition, but because their fruition is orchestrated by the social structure itself. He notes:

> The major theoretical problem…is to distinguish between alternative and oppositional initiatives and contributions which are made within a specific hegemony (which then sets certain limits to them or which can succeed in neutralizing, changing or actually incorporating them) and other kinds of initiative and contribution which are irreducible to the terms of the original [….] hegemony, and are in that sense independent. It can be persuasively argued that all or nearly all initiatives and contributions, even when they take on manifestly alternative or oppositional forms, are in practice tied to the hegemonic: that the dominant culture, so to say, at once produces and limits its own forms of counter-culture.[4]

The problem, then, with such rebellion is that it fails even as it seemingly succeeds. This is because its success was never its own but that of the hegemony it hoped to either subvert or dismantle. The dominant culture gives rise to rebellion that the rebels may be limited, controlled. Because of this, the dominant culture is nearly impossible to overthrow. Even as it seems to be under attack, on the verge of dissolution, it perseveres. Its talent lies in its ability to survive. Jonathan Dollimore notes that "established power structures often prove resilient even, or especially, when destabilized."[5]

[4] Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. Pg. 114.
[5] Dollimore, Jonathan. *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991. Pg. 90.

This does not mean, however, that they cannot be gradually altered or even abandoned altogether. The question is one of strategy. Dollimore posits:

> [At] certain historical conjectures certain kinds of nonconformity may be more transgressive in opting not for extreme lawlessness but for a strategy of inclusion. To be half successful is to lay claim to sharing with dominant (though never equally) a language, culture and identity: to participate in is also to contaminate the dominant's authenticity and to counter its own discriminatory function.[6]

He argues that the dominant culture, the manifestation of morality, can be undermined through surreptitious infiltration. The dominant culture's thought purity can be adulterated and therefore modified when the subculture conforms enough to pass for the dominant without relinquishing its, the subculture's, own aims and identity; the subculture can then subtly, silently influence the dominant culture as a false ally. It can subvert, and perhaps even overthrow, as an approximation, a resemblance…as an imposter.

If masculinism's quest is for freedom, then free agency within the dominant culture, however furtive it must be kept, would of course prove a valuable tool in fulfilling it. To this end, masculinism as a literary mode is rooted in or made possible through an actual alliance *as* a subculture and a feigned alliance *with* the dominant culture, and it wages its rebellion against that dominant culture, *morality*, through transgression. In *City of God,* Augustine argues that "man's wretchedness is nothing but his own disobedience to himself, so that because he would not do what he could, he now wills to do what he cannot."[7] Augustine links freewill, the autonomy the masculinist hopes to achieve, to transgression, to the ability to flout the tenets of religion, morality, and culture. Although he insists on the righteousness of choosing a moral life, he does so only after confessing his own crime and the pleasure it afforded him:

> With the basest companions I walked the streets of Babylon […] Our only pleasure in [theft] was that it was forbidden. […] The malice of the act was base and I loved it – that is to say I loved my own undoing, I loved the evil in me – not the thing for which I did the evil: my soul was depraved and hurled itself down from security

[6] *Sexual Dissidence.* Pg. 51.
[7] Augustine, St. *City of God.* Tr. Philip Levine. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966. Pg. 575.

> in You into utter destruction, seeking no profit from wickedness but only to be wicked…if I took so much as one bite of any of those [stolen] pears it was the sin that sweetened it.[8]

Augustine would of course come to be known as one of the most prominent contributors to Western Christianity. In this passage, however, he suggests something that masculinism, a decidedly anti-religious literary mode, would later appropriate as part of its own doctrine: the association between transgression, authenticity, and pleasure. Under masculinism, wickedness, an integral component of man's constitution, comes to be seen as natural and indicative of the unsublimated self. And the sweetness, the *pleasure,* Augustine deems the result of sin, becomes demonstrative of freedom from morality. Whereas Augustine accounts for the *existence* of otherwise inexplicable sin with the notion of freewill, masculinism accounts for the *naming* and *categorization* of sin with the notion of sublimation, or unfreedom. Pleasure is then the evidence of authenticity, its own unspoken verification that cultural conditioning cannot alter the self entirely. Though Augustine links pleasure to transgression in general, using the religiously symbolic act of the stealing of fruit as an example, masculinism tends to see pleasure as rooted in sensuality, as necessarily connected to the body. This helps to explain why sexual nonconformity is so often thematically central in masculinist texts.

Dollimore elaborates this point, explaining that "we have become used to thinking of sexuality as an anarchic and hence potentially subversive energy which conservatives want to control, radicals want to liberate"[9]; it is no wonder, then, that masculinism, with its implicit correlation to gender and sexuality, would defy the dominant culture through acts, or depictions, of sexual deviance. Philip Roth's oeuvre clearly epitomizes this endeavor. For this dissertation, an array of other works and authors that could illustrate masculinism as a literary mode were also considered, ranging from Henry Miller's *The World of Sex* to Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* to any number of novels by Martin Amis or John Updike. Imperative was that they were both exceptional, *canonical,* and (morally/sexually) aberrant; they needed to be indubitably well crafted and flagrantly, even shockingly, degenerate. Ultimately, three authors and works were chosen for this inquiry into masculinism: André Gide's *The Immoralist*, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, and Philip Roth's

[8] Augustine, St. *Confessions.* Tr. F.J. Sheed. London: Sheed and Ward, 1944. Pg. iii-iv.
[9] *Sexual Dissidence.* Pg. 83.

Sabbath's Theater. Each work exemplifies a masculinist individualism tied to both transgression and authenticity and tests the limits, or limitlessness, of artistic freedom. Additionally, each contrasts its protagonist's dissoluteness with the moral constraints his environment places, or attempts to place, upon him.

The works are meant to represent different moments in twentieth-century literary history, spanning from *fin de siècle* French modernism to US-American post-modernism. This span is not intended to suggest a direct correlation between masculinism and any other literary ism, but to show that it, though more or less situated in the twentieth century, actually overlaps and blends in with various literary movements; it is not anchored to a single location or era.

The earliest work, Gide's *The Immoralist*, was first published in France in 1902. It explicitly covers Michel's initial adherence to and eventual disavowal of his stringent Protestant upbringing; his alternating conformity and nonconformity to French bourgeois morality; his dissemblance as a man of principle; and the ultimate dissolution and recasting of his identity. Implicitly, the novella also captures the plight of a man whose sexual orientation has been kept hidden from him by 'layers of acquired knowledge,' sublimation through cultivation, and whose recovery from tuberculosis proves pivotal to his personal evolution. When he finds himself on the mend in Biskra, newly married and suddenly aware of his physicality, he commits to a less sedentary, more sensual existence. He discovers his tacitly sexual fascination with the 'Arab boys' and increasing indifference to his wife, Marceline. He also identifies two irreconcilable facets of himself: the public figure whose conventional marriage and respected profession reflect the values of turn-of-the-century French morality, and the decadent whose latent homosexuality and penchant for transgression threatens to undermine the social system he seems to embody.

Needless to say, *The Immoralist*, which Gordon A. Schulz aptly identifies as reflective of "Nietzsche's ideas of extreme individualism and the conflict between culture and instinct,"[10] drew the ire of countless critics. In one of the novella's more illuminative scenes, Michel describes a lecture he gives on the virtue of barbarism:

[10] Schulz, Gordon A. "Guilty Man and Tragic Man in Decadent Tales of 'Fin-De-Siècle' Europe." *International Journal of Psychoanalytic Self Psychology.* 4:1-20, 2009.

> Discussing the decline of Latin civilization, I described artistic culture as rising to the surface of a people, at first a symptom of plethora, the superabundance of health, then immediately hardening, calcifying, opposing any true contact of the mind with nature, concealing beneath the persistent appearance of life the diminution of life, forming a rind in which the hindered spirit languishes, withers and dies. Finally, carrying my notion to its conclusion, I said that Culture, born of life, ultimately kills life.[11]

His assertion that culture 'ultimately kills life' can be read as *the* masculinist treatise in that it points to the stifling nature of culture, on the one hand, and the want of its undoing on the other. The reinvigoration of mind and body, Michel intimates, is contingent on escaping the high culture that stagnates the authentic self under the pretense of cultivating or enlightening it. Michel's, and subsequently Gide's, proposed return to barbarism is provocative, of course, but also compelling. After all, Michel belongs to the class he seems to want to overthrow; in this, the subculture of which he is a part is able to penetrate and influence the dominant culture. The treatise, which may be rejected by most, will surely resonate with at least some. The assertion is not merely incensing; it is inciting. In this, *The Immoralist* is, both chronologically and thematically, a fitting starting point for this exploration of masculinism.

In addition, the work meets the artistic, or *stylistic,* requirements of this inquiry. It is unquestionably an expert work by an accomplished writer. In 1946, André Gide was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature "for his comprehensive and artistically significant writings, in which human problems and conditions have been presented with a fearless love of truth and keen psychological insight."[12] Soon after, his entire oeuvre was entered in the Roman Catholic Index of Forbidden Books. Undoubtedly, then, Gide's work is both exceptional, *canonical,* and (sexually/morally) aberrant; it is lauded by some, deplored by others. This polemic, the apparent irreconcilability of high art and 'immoral' subject matter, will prove an essential propellant of this analysis.

[11] Gide, André. *The Immoralist.* Tr. Richard Howard. New York: Vintage Books, 1970. Pg. 93.
[12] Available at: https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1947/gide/facts/

The second book in this dissertation, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, was first published in Paris in 1955. Although Nabokov penned and eventually published the novel in English before translating it into his native Russian, publishing houses in the United States and United Kingdom were initially uninterested in taking on what would ultimately prove to be his most extolled work. Its overt salaciousness, it seemed, rendered the manuscript too off-putting to publish outside of France. Its reception, needless to say, was varied. Orville Prescott wrote a review for *The New York Times* in which he disparaged *Lolita* as "dull, dull, dull in a pretentious, florid, and archly fatuous fashion."[13] In *Spectator,* Kingsley Amis, whose son, Martin Amis, would later write an approbative introduction to the novel, decried it as "bad as a work of art, and morally bad…a Charles Atlas muscle-man of language as opposed to the healthy and youthful adult."[14] But, then, there were also those who recognized the merit of the work; Elizabeth Janeway, a book reviewer for *The New York Times,* insisted: "This is still one of the funniest and one of the saddest books that will be published this year. As for its pornographic content, I can think of a few volumes more likely to quench the flames of lust than this exact and immediate description of its consequences."[15]

In "'The Strange Particularity of the Lover's Preference': Pedophilia, Pornography, and the Anatomy of Monstrosity in *Lolita*," Frederick Whiting argues that Nabokov feared the book would be read as autobiographical and he, as its author, would be condemned a pedophile/pornographer. Whiting contends:

> As Nabokov knew all too well, monstrous births invariably occasion questions about the parents that engendered them. He originally contemplated publishing the novel anonymously because, as he correctly foresaw, a novel about the predilections of a monstrous pedophile like Humbert was certain to suggest that its author and progenitor was another of the period's monsters, a pornographer.[16]

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[13] Prescott, Orville. "Books of the Times." *The New York Times.* August 18, 1958. Available at: http://movies2.nytimes.com/books/97/03/02/lifetimes/nab-r-booksoftimes.html

[14] Amis, Kingsley. "She Was a Child and I Was a Child." *The Spectator.* November 6, 1959. Available at: http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/6th-november-1959/23/books

[15] Janeway, Elizabeth. "The Tragedy of Man Driven by Desire." *The New York Times.* August 17, 1958. Available at: http://movies2.nytimes.com/books/97/03/02/lifetimes/nab-r-lolita.html

[16] Whiting, Frederick. "The Strange Particularity of the Lover's Preference: Pedophilia, Pornography, and the Anatomy of Monstrosity in *Lolita*." *American Literature.* Vol. 70, No.4, 1998. Pg. 848.

It seems, however, that Nabokov remained, or at least hoped to appear, unfazed by the impressions of others. In *Strong Opinions,* he maintains, "I don't think that an artist should bother about his audience. His best audience is the person he sees in his shaving mirror every morning. I think that the audience an author imagines, when he imagines that kind of thing, is a room filled with people wearing his own mask."[17] But in "Romantic Parody and the Ironic Muse in 'Lolita,'" Brian D. Walter questions Nabokov's indifference to *Lolita's* readership and its reaction, arguing that "the hostile reader" serves as "Humbert's (and as it turns out, Nabokov's) ironic muse." The actual, and likely contentious, reader is, Walter insists, a "important source of inspiration"[18] for Humbert's memoir.

Regardless of the extent to which audience matters to Nabokov or his protagonist, Humbert, the fact of the matter is that *Lolita* certainly was, and to some degree still is, a controversial novel. Humbert's memoir, the text within the text, details his broad obsession with 'nymphets,' the pubescent girls whose liminality he finds so alluring, and his enduring infatuation with and recurrent violation of the book's namesake, Lolita. Essentially, Humbert is a child-rapist and his memoir an atonement. And *Lolita* would appear to be a book about exploitation, abuse. But it is also about the arbitrariness of morality and the convoluted boundaries between right and wrong, good and evil. Humbert is unreliable as a narrator, but his narrative also points to the unreliability of social structures and the values that define them.

He seeks freedom from the prescripts that render his (sexual) acts criminal and from the judgment of his high-minded contemporaries; he also seeks the latitude to act on his incorrigible (and therefore 'natural,' unsublimated) impulses. For this reason, *Lolita*, like *The Immoralist,* homes in on the antagonism between man and civilization and does so through the remembrances of a protagonist as equally immoral as Michel.

The last of the novels to be explored in this dissertation is of course by Philip Roth, who is simultaneously one of the most prolific, awarded and denounced writers of the twentieth century

[17] Nabokov, Vladimir. *Strong Opinions.* New York: Vintage Books International, 1973. Pg. 18.
[18] Walter, Brian D. "Romantic Parody and the Ironic Muse in 'Lolita.'" *Essays in Literature.* Vol. 22, No. 1, 1995. Pg. 5.

(and beyond). Roth, perhaps more so than Gide or Nabokov, has inspired, even encouraged, indignation. His work, it seems, is meant to outrage. For Roth is neither as introspective as Gide nor as playful as Nabokov; he is incisive and eloquent and at times witty and endearing, but he is also intransigent, insolent, detached. He does not try to appease his critics or audience, for he is also (or also seems to be) outraged, an affectation he passes onto the most tragic of his characters: Mickey Sabbath. Joel Diggory contends:

> Roth's major innovation within the American discourse on tragedy […] lies in how *Sabbath's Theater* inherits these distinctively Nietzschean ways of valuing tragedy, building upon Aries's critique of the "modern interdiction of death in order to preserve happiness," by showing how Mickey Sabbath's tragic sensibility contains a brilliant ebullience that is not available to America's anti-tragedy modernity.[19]

Although Diggory goes on to lament that Roth has too often been viewed through a masculinist lens and that the virtuosity of the (very real, very human) tragedy he creates has often suffered or been misread because of it, Diggory's assessment is actually in line with the stance of this dissertation. In this inquiry, masculinism is not as phallocentric as one might assume; again, it is merely angst-ridden, absconding. The tragedy of Mickey Sabbath is not the fixation with women and sex that ultimately leads to his fixation with death and mortality. Instead, the tragedy is in his desire to attain and to keep what exists only in dreams, memories; the tragedy is in his desire to hold onto happiness, endlessness.

We are warned not to empathize with or to project onto literary characters, but in Sabbath there is a self-loathing, self-annihilating hurt that intimations of misogyny and homophobia, a general fear of the other, fail to mask. He renounces morality, and ultimately life itself, not as a fierce combatant against the system, but as a broken man. Unable to recover what has been lost – his mother, his brother, his lovers…his ideals, Sabbath, too, embarks on a quest for freedom; he knows, though, that the only freedom to be found is in death.

[19] Diggory, Joel. "'Tragedy Wrought to its Uttermost': Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater* and the Art of Dying." *Philip Roth Studies.* Vol. 12, No. 2, 2016. Pg. 51.

Herbert Marcuse posits, "Western civilization has always glorified the hero, the sacrifice of life for the city, the state, the nation; it has rarely asked the question of whether the established city, state or nation were worth the sacrifice."[20] For Sabbath, the glorified hero is fallen. When his brother, Morty, is shot down during World War II, Sabbath becomes disillusioned with ideas and ideals of city, nation and state. Morty falls, and an anti-hero rises. Whereas Morty embodies virtue and self-sacrifice, Sabbath exudes degeneracy and self-indulgence. He becomes a caricature of man, a performer of indecency.

Sabbath's Theater came out in 1995. It was of course shocking because of its detailed descriptions of sexual acts, including threesomes, lesbian trysts, and the desecration (through masturbation) of a gravesite. But it had been thirty-five years since Roth's debut book, *Goodbye, Columbus,* was published and had won the National Book Award for Fiction. In those thirty-five years, Roth had composed a profusion of other novels that skillfully, unapologetically, depicted touchy, or seemingly untouchable, themes. And, Claudia Roth Pierpont observes, "Of all the subjects that Philip Roth has tackled in his career – the Jewish family, sex, American ideals, the betrayal of American ideals, political zealotry, personal identity, the list could go on and on – none have proved as inexhaustible as the human body (usually male) in its strength, its frailty, and its often ridiculous need."[21] By 1995, Roth's work was expected to shock. Even so, *Sabbath's Theater* was hardly universally acclaimed. Michiko Kakutani of *The New York Times* famously disparaged the work as "distasteful and disingenuous,"[22] and others found it over-the-top, even for Roth. But Harold Bloom, who has long been the mouthpiece of America's literary canon, called it Roth's "masterpiece,"[23] and James Wood admitted it was "an extraordinary book."[24] Thirty-five years after *Goodbye. Columbus*, it too won the National Book Award for Fiction.

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[20] Marcuse, Herbert. *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry Into Freud.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1974. Pg. xix.
[21] Pierpont, Claudia Roth. "The Great Enemy of Books." *The New Yorker.* May 1, 2006. Pg. 82-87. Available at: https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/05/01/the-great-enemy
[22] Kakutani, Michiko. "Books of the Times; Mickey Sabbath, You're No Portnoy." *The New York Times.* April 22, 1995. Available at: http://movies2.nytimes.com/books/97/03/02/lifetimes/nab-r-lolita.html
[23] Bloom, Harold. *Genius: A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds.* New York: Warner Books, 2003. Pg. 207.
[24] Birnbaum, Robert. "James Wood by Robert Birnbaum." *Morning News.* July 13, 2004. (Permanent dead link)

Although there were other works that could have been included in this dissertation, *The Immoralist, Lolita,* and *Sabbath's Theater* stood out as ones that had to be. First, it of course seems natural to bookend an exploration of twentieth-century literature with novels published near the beginning and end of that century. Second, it was imperative to choose writers whose eminence could not be questioned, whose virtuosity had already been recognized by credible literary critics and prize committees. Lastly, the works needed to not only fall under this rethinking of masculinism as a futile quest for freedom, but to epitomize it.

Having decided on the three works that would best meet these qualifications, the theoretical apparatus for this project needed to be (re)considered. Freud's theories of sexuality have justly come under fire over the past several decades, as many scholars have found fault, and identified misogyny, in his ideas about penis envy, the male structure of the libido, female hysteria, and the inception, and even existence, of repression. In fact, it is not uncommon to hear declarations of the 'debunking' of Freud. The question is whether it is now possible, or even ethical, to use his theories as a tool for literary analysis. Is it still tenable to read literature through a Freudian lens?

The truth of the matter is that masculinism as both a cultural myth and literary mode *is* Freudian. To separate it from the theories that if not engendered at least gave names, values, to its condition would be negligent. Debra Shostak notes that "Roth refers openly to *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), where Freud identified the root conflict of Western culture – and not just of Jewish manhood – as the struggle between instinctual satisfaction and renunciation."[25] In "Into the Clear," David Remnick also draws a definitive connection between Roth and Freud, explaining, "Roth has a longstanding interest in the psychoanalytic works of Sigmund Freud and once actually described Freud as a 'great, tragic poet, our Sophocles.'"[26]

Nabokov, though less assured of Freud, demonstrates the scope of his own meticulous reading of him through Humbert's countless references to "the Viennese medicine man"[27] and his ideas in

[25] Shostak, Debra. "Roth and Gender". *The Cambridge Companion to Philip Roth.* Ed. Timothy Parrish. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pg. 115.
[26] Remnick, David. "Into the Clear." *The New Yorker.* May 8, 2000. Available at: https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2000/05/08/into-the-clear
[27] Nabokov, Vladimir. *Lolita.* New York: Everyman's Library, 1992. Pg. 274.

Lolita. Gide, who was a contemporary of Freud, references him more tangentially. Though it is unclear if Gide ever encountered Freud or read his work, it is certain that he at least knew of him and his revolutionary theories of sexuality. André Britan was a friend of Gide's who had been working in a psychiatric hospital when Freud's ideas began to gain ground across Europe. He recalls:

> At the same time as I became aware of how Apollinaire was strolling across the Boulevard Saint-Germain with Orpheus' beasts in tow, I discovered that someone had independently broken through into the night of ideas, where they were at their thickest: Sigmund Freud…I was twenty years old when during a holiday in Paris I tried to explain to Apollinaire, Valiry and Gide one after another how Freud – whose name was at the time only known to a few psychiatrists in France – seemed to have turned the world of the spirit upside down…[28]

And the world, for better or worse, would never be the same. Neither would literature. Marcuse condenses Freud's metapsychology to "an ever-renewed attempt to uncover, and to question, the terrible necessity of the inner connection between civilization and barbarism, progress and suffering, freedom and unhappiness"[29]; in short, Freud's metapsychology mirrors, or perhaps anticipates, Michel's (and therefore Gide's) experiment with freedom.

Freud's theories on sexuality, particularly those on female sexuality (or lack thereof), would seem to render anomalous even his more general philosophies on the antagonism between man and civilization. But his ideas did not emanate in a vacuum; they are, in fact, as much a product of social, historical circumstance as his own research and observations. There are, for example, clear traces of Nietzschean thought in his work, including the unrealized potential of the individual or 'Übermensch' and the idea that moral conformity equates 'herd mentality.' Nietzsche writes about the utilitarian function of man as part of society's machine. Freud also addresses this function but does so through from an economic perspective. In his *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, Freud contends that society's reason for modifying man's instinctual structure is "economic; since it [society] has not means enough to support life for its members without work on their part, it must see to it that the number of these members is restricted and their energies directed away from

[28] Available at: https://www.freud-museum.at/online/freud/chronolg/1921-e.htm
[29] *Eros and Civilization.* Pg. 17.

sexual activities on to their work."[30] Both Nietzsche and Freud perceive an essential part of self sacrificed in the name of the greater good; Freud, however, sees this sacrifice as a loss, or reorganization, of libido. For him, most sexual energy is transformed to productive energy (labor); what is left is expected to be heteronormative, monogamous, procreative.

Erich Fromm agrees with Freud's contention that civilization rests on the sublimation of the instincts and subsequent negation of self. His seminal essay *On Disobedience* uses Freud's work to explain how civilization eliminates individual freedom in exchange for convenience, comfort and safety. Even Michel Foucault, whose work on sexuality as discourse seems a stark departure from Freudian psychoanalysis, discusses the social structures meant to keep human sexuality and other 'behaviors' and 'identities' in check. It seems impossible, in fact, to talk about sexual conformity or deviance at all without somehow at least alluding to Freud. To some extent, he created modern sexuality, or at least the language we use to examine it.

It is important to note, too, that, despite the (warranted) claims of misogyny made against him, Freud has done much to unsettle the binary categorization of sex and gender and to advance the naturalness of homo- and bi-sexuality. In fact, his theories have been integral in creating new opportunities for and meanings of sexed identity as such. Perhaps it is for this reason that even some of the great feminist thinkers, including Helene Deutsch and Karen Horney, who have taken issue with (among other things) his notions of castration and penis envy, adhere, at least in part, to a Freudian psychoanalysis. Even theorists like Luce Iriguay and Julia Kristeva, who have problematized (also among other things) Freud's inattention to mothers, have been able to transform his ideas in order to discuss sexual difference and signification.

Because masculinism is itself Freudian, and because Freud's more general theories about the sublimation of the instincts and the hostility between man and civilization speak to the argument being made about masculinism in this inquiry, this dissertation will continue to use a mostly Freudian lens to hone masculinist themes in literature. It will not, however, take all of Freud's claims at face value, and will instead use his more general, less divisive theories as a tool for

[30] Freud, Sigmund. *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis.* New York: Garden City Publishing Co., 1943. Pg. 273.

inquiry. In addition, the theoretical apparatus for this dissertation will be reinforced by the work of other reputable scholars, including some of those mentioned above.

The final consideration for this project was linked neither to masculinism itself, nor the works or theories that would best exemplify it. Instead it asked what within those masculinist works should be analyzed. In *Character: Three Inquiries in Literary Studies,* Amanda Anderson, Rita Felski and Tori Moi take on the ongoing predicament, *denunciation,* of character analysis in literary studies. They observe that "the literary theories of recent decades," and particularly those in alignment with the formalist school of criticism, "stressed the status of characters as texts in order to void them of impact or import: imaginary persons, it was argued, were linguistic illusions and bundles of signifiers."[31] After all, what are characters except words on a page, textual constructs? How naïve must one be, queried these literary formalists, to talk about, interpret, or (psycho)analyze characters as if they were more than bits of texts, parts of fiction…as if they were human? In "Rethinking Character," Moi specifies the foci of "abstract, historicizing formalists" as not characters, but "patterns, tropes, figures, and other literary techniques."[32]

In the last few years, John Frow has identified two types of literary critics: those who feel "characters are to be treated as though they were persons" and those who feel they "are to be treated purely as textual constructs."[33] This divide has made attention to character over style and elocution seem both unsophisticated and dated. In *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel*, Alex Woloch recognizes this recent taboo on "treating characters as if they were real people."[34] But that, character analysis, is exactly what this dissertation performs. It of course interprets *The Immoralist, Lolita* and *Sabbath's Theater* as masculinist texts, paying some attention to 'formal' details such as syntax and diction, but it essentially dissects Michel, Humbert and Sabbath, their aspirations, motivations and their regrets, thus creating a masculinist profile of sorts.

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[31] Anderson, Amanda; Felski, Rita; Moi, Toril. "Introduction." *Character: Three Inquiries in Literary Studies.* Eds. Amanda Anderson, Rita Felski and Toril Moi. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019. Pg. 19.
[32] Moi, Toril. "Rethinking Character." *Character: Three Inquiries in Literary Studies.* Eds. Amanda Anderson, Rita Felski and Toril Moi. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019. Pg. 32.
[33] Frow, John. *Character and Person.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pg. 25.
[34] Woloch, Alex. *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003. Pg. 15.

Anderson, Felski and Moi note that characters, particularly in philosophy and literature, can be used to "exemplify instructive forms of response to the conditions of human condition or demands of moral life."[35] But characters need not serve a didactic function. In her superb essay "Identifying with Characters," Rita Felski introduces the notion of 'ironic identification' in which "a sense of estrangement and dissociation is the connecting tissue binding character and reader."[36] This ironic identification, this connection via detachment, can link us as readers to masculinist characters, while also allowing us as critics to relate masculinist characters to each other. Felski finds that ironic identification pinpoints a commonality between 'people,' fictitious and real, who feel "at odds with the mainstream of social life."[37] She observes:

> Quite a few protagonists of modern fiction – solitary, adrift, and sardonic or melancholic – solicit such forms of affiliation: *The Immoralist, Nausea, Invisible Man, The Piano Teacher.* And here the vectors of causality are hard to pin down. Are readers drawn to fictional characters who crystallize their own feelings of anomie, or are they schooled in a sense of estrangement and ennui by reading works of modernist literature? The result, in either case, is what we might call an alliance of strangers: fictional and real persons linked by a shared sense of disassociation. It is often assumed that identifying and irony are mutually exclusive: where one is, the other cannot be. And yet irony turns out to be a surprisingly common means of identification.[38]

So, in spite of the recent trend to analyze form over character, this dissertation will pick apart the protagonists of the three texts not as if they were real, but as if they could be. This 'alliance of strangers' will create a character profile by which to identify, interpret and connect masculinists and to trace their actual impact as (inter)textual constructs.

To analyze these characters and their gainless quest for freedom, this dissertation will be broken up into five subsequent chapters, each of which will highlight a central theme of masculinist

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[35] "Introduction." Pg. 7-8.
[36] Felski, Rita. "Identifying with Characters." *Character: Three Inquiries in Literary Studies.* Eds. Amanda Anderson, Rita Felski and Toril Moi. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019. Pg. 113.
[37] *Ibid.* Pg. 113.
[38] *Ibid.* Pg. 113.

literature. The first chapter, "Truth in Transgression: Authenticity and the Plight of the Adamantly Dissolute Artist," will link the sexual deviance detailed in masculinist literature to notions of artistic sincerity. This chapter will include theories of the modern emergence of self that speak to both an increasing awareness of the prevalence of patriarchal control and a subsequent (artistic, philosophical) trend toward individualism and autonomy. It will also relate masculinism to the tenets of the Decadent Movement, emphasizing the Decadent revival of aestheticism and its mantra of 'art for art's sake.' The chapter will argue that masculinist literature is not unnecessarily crude, as some critics have intimated, but rather purposefully so, in that it uses degeneracy as a vehicle of creative expression and as a means to test the limits (or limitlessness) of artistic dispensation. It will highlight the literary disclaimers invoked by Gide, Nabokov and Roth to persuade their readership of the veracity to be found in what might otherwise be disregarded as mere pornography, citing sex and sexuality as an integral aspect of the human condition.

The next chapter will center on "Polymorphous Perversity and the Revolt of the Sexually Deviant." It will begin with a philosophical overview of sexuality and gender, outlining the differences between essentialist and constructionist standpoints by connecting them to the work of eminent sexual theorists such as Judith Butler and Michel Foucault as well as eminent writers like Oscar Wilde and of course André Gide. The purport of this overview is not to reinforce the divide between the two standpoints, but to show the ways in which the defining of gender and sexuality has (rightly) become convoluted, problematic. The chapter will draw from Freud's famous postulate that perversity is both natural and innate and that the proscription of perverse acts, including extramarital and homosexual intercourse, is grounded in a utilitarian morality dependent on procreative monogamy. It will show how Michel, Humbert and Sabbath subvert the proscriptive moral structure through polymorphous perversity and find agency (and gratification) in sexual dissidence. The body will be shown to be the locus of a revolt between man and civilization, pleasure and reality.

The third chapter on "Freedom, Unfreedom and the De-sublimation of the Individual" is inexorably the longest. It will contextualize the inveterate question of free will in a twentieth-century framework, using Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* and Erich Fromm's *On Disobedience* to illustrate how autonomy, though thwarted by civilization, is (at least partially)

realized through transgression. It will connect freedom to the pleasure principle and unfreedom to the reality principle, again fore-fronting the (sexual) body as an instrument of subversion. The chapter will detail how most are convinced to forfeit freedom for the illusion of happiness and the comforts of home, and the extent to which Michel, Humbert and Sabbath instead forfeit comfort, and arguably even happiness, for the illusion of freedom. The Nietzschean construct of time personified in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* will be presented as that which cannot be conquered, as the final, impenetrable obstacle in the masculinist quest. While civilization can be undermined through dissemblance or desertion, the onslaught of time – the death and decay – invariably endures, ultimately impeding freedom. The inevitability of time will thus be evidenced as the silent, insidious antagonist in each of the three works.

The following chapter will springboard off this concept of time, reconfiguring it as the progenitor of a desire predicated on a lack. In "Desire: Recovering the Lost Object," the ubiquitous (mis)interpretation of desire as simple sexual longing will be challenged by the Lacanian construct of *objet petit a,* the 'lost object,' desire seeks to replace. Desire will be shown as an unfillable void carved from the absence of what was and a want to restore what no longer is. This chapter will detail how each of the three protagonists attempt to reconstruct the past, and recover the lost object, through the repetition and protraction of desire. It will show how Michel recurrently replaces one object of desire with another, handily retracting his affection when each boy he fancies ceases to be a boy. Humbert's obsession with Lolita will be read as an aftereffect of his unconsummated affair with Annabel and Lolita herself as a willed reincarnation of the love he lost. Sabbath's lost object, however, will prove more complicated and more equivocal to discern, demonstrating a shift in the latter half of the twentieth century in the masculinist understanding of desire as such. For Sabbath, unlike Michel or Humbert, endeavors not to recreate a lost object but loss itself. His desire, it will be shown, is based on both the absence of the maternal and the filial need for approbation. Aware that he cannot recover happiness, the endlessness of childhood, he instead focuses his efforts on protracting the pain of loss. This will become especially evident in his interactions with his mother's ghost, for the specter is the symbol, as Slavoj Žižek succinctly puts it, of "unsettled accounts."[39]

[39] Žižek, Slavoj. *The Mestases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Women and Causality.* New York: Verso, 1994. Pg. 193.

The final chapter of this dissertation will lead us to the periphery of a now popular field of literary and cultural studies: postcolonialism. Building on, though not fully adhering to, Edward Said's *Orientalism*, this chapter will explore the extent to which masculinism depicts "Nomadism and the Eroticization of the Foreign." *The Immoralist* serves as an obvious example of the eroticization and exploitation of the foreign other; this is made explicit in both its reimagining of Gide's own travels and sexual encounters in North Africa and the fact that it is directly referenced in Said's study. This chapter is not meant to vilify but to situate, contextualize, the work; to show that freedom, or the illusion thereof, comes at a cost. We will see how the 'primitive,' defined by Western hegemonies, is extolled and sexualized by the masculinists who see it as de-sublimated. And then we will stretch the definition of the primitive to connote the eroticized foreigner, at home and abroad: Humbert, the degenerate of dubious descent; Drenka, the insatiable (and bisexual) Croatian; Sabbath, the recalcitrant Jew. This chapter will also look at nomadism and 'nomadology,' the mobility of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theoretical 'war machine' that fights against and subverts the patriarchal social structure. It will connect nomadism to escapism (the trope of flight) and escapism to nomadology, making clear the correlation between peregrination and lawlessness, movement and (perceived) freedom.

Finally, this dissertation will ruminate the implications of each of these masculinist texts, the reverberations of each of these protagonist's actions. It will do so under the impression that art is never for art's sake alone. It will do so knowing there is something to be learned from these characters, not because they are human, real, but because they are not. They will be shown as the manifestations, the distillations, of man's hopes and fears, but, most importantly, his *surrender.* For they are the last stand against the post-gendered, pan-sexual society that they have unwittingly helped to create. And they, the masculinist (anti-)heroes of masculinist literature, are raising the white flag, as they, with all their (post)modern angst and alienation, submit to and usher in a new literary era centered on cultural pluralism.

TRUTH IN TRANSGRESSION: AUTHENTICITY AND THE PLIGHT OF THE ADAMANTLY DISSOLUTE ARTIST

As stated, this chapter will address the 'modern' emergence of self and concomitant trend toward individualism in light of a growing awareness of patriarchal control. In doing so, it will echo some of modernism's more avant-garde ideas about the subversion of morality as a means to uncover and set free the 'authentic self' otherwise stifled by an intricate stratum of cultural conditioning and acquired knowledge. In *A Glossary of Literary Terms,* M.H. Abrams explains that the avant-garde artists of the modernist movement sought, in Ezra Pound's famous phrasing, to 'make it new' by flouting conventional themes and styles and embracing the different and daring, even the prohibited:

> By violating the accepted conventions and proprieties, not only of art but of social discourse, they set out to create ever-new artistic forms and styles and to introduce hitherto neglected, and sometimes forbidden subject matter. Frequently, avant-garde artists represent themselves as 'alienated' from the established order, against which they assert their own autonomy; a prominent aim is to shock the sensibilities of the conventional reader and to challenge the norms and pieties of the dominant bourgeois culture.[40]

Abrams's description of the avant-garde artist clearly speaks to the masculinist quest for freedom, for *autonomy*, born of the knowledge that convention is a means to prescribe and control attitudes and behaviors. This is evidenced in Michel's antipathy to the esteemed man of principle and Humbert's dismissal of sexual taboos as unfixed and arbitrary. The avant-garde aim to 'shock the sensibilities of the conventional reader' is nowhere more apparent than in Sabbath's aptly named Indecent Theater. That said, the masculinist affinity to avant-garde themes need not, and should not, place masculinism as such within the modernist literary tradition. Doing so would invariably limit the scope of thematically analogous texts and apportion writers to the nebulous isms to which they may or may not entirely adhere; it would draw a hard line between *The Immoralist*, often touted as an emblem of modern French literature, and *Sabbath's Theater*, which a number of critics

[40] Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms: Seventh Edition.* Orlando: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1999. Pg. 168.

have delineated as typically postmodern. For instance, in "Transgression in the Fiction of Philip Roth," Robert M. Greenberg notes:

> In a dim, emblematic way, the self-conscious postmodern mode is not entirely absent from Roth's treatment of transgression in *Sabbath's Theater.* […] Roth's depiction of second-generation Jewish-American protagonists might arguably be seen as a representation of, or a trope for, a more generalized late twentieth-century alienation.[41]

This concept of alienation, however, appears and reappears throughout the twentieth century. It is as emblematic of avant-garde modernism as it is of postmodernism; and it, this trope of (actual and felt) isolation, is constituent of each of the three works in this inquiry.

In "Roth, literary influence and postmodernism," Derek Parker Royal differentiates between postmodern writing, wherein "texts are aware of and refer to themselves as constructed narratives,"[42] and modern writing, which promotes, rather than problematizes, "such concepts as originality, universality, self-contained authority, unity, and 'genius.'"[43] He furthers that postmodernism tends to question "both originality and authenticity, emphasize indeterminacy and contingency, present subjected experience as fragmented, and subvert distinctions between 'high' and 'low' culture."[44] While Royal's demarcations disconnect Gide from Roth, as expected, they do little to account for the occasional categorization of Nabokov's *Lolita* as a modernist text. After all, Humbert's experiences, his broken recollections, are clearly fragmented; and this indeterminacy, this *unreliability*, as a narrator constantly threatens to undermine the already unlikely story he tells. The story's emphasis on, and even obsession with, signification, *semiotics*, is equally convoluting. Frederick Whiting notes:

> The inheritors of formalist interest have contended that the novel's seemingly exclusive concern with the pay of signification and the convolutions of language make it postmodern or at least proto-

[41] Greenberg, Robert M. "Transgression in the Fiction of Philip Roth." *Twentieth-Century Literature.* Vol. 43, No. 4, 1997. Pg. 503-504.
[42] Royal, Derek Parker. "Roth, literary influence, and postmodernism." *The Cambridge Companion to Philip Roth.* Ed. Timothy Parrish. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pg. 26.
[43] *Ibid.* Pg. 33.
[44] *Ibid.* Pg. 33.

> postmodern – a prophetic exemplum of the Barthesian model of language, albeit one reluctant to abandon the defenestrated notion of an author.[45]

In this, *Lolita*, like all literary texts, teeters between what it is and is not; its boundaries are not pronounced but blurred.

It is not the intent of this dissertation to discriminate between modernist and postmodernist texts or to call such discriminations into question, and it is certainly not my intent to disparage Royal's work (the essay excerpted above is in fact excellent) or that of other literary critics. These opening paragraphs are simply meant to problematize the situating of masculinism within extant literary frameworks, to not only show but to stress the overlap between the isms that might lay claim to it. This exploration will draw from various traditions, movements and trends, evincing the difficulty of pinning down that which this dissertation hopes to encircle and define. So, instead of *directly* correlating masculinism to that which has already been encircled and defined, the plethora of pre-existing isms, this chapter will probe more generally into the masculinist amalgamation of art, authenticity and dissidence. It will highlight what Jonathan Dollimore acutely describes as "the importance in modern Western culture of transgression in the name of an essential self which is the origin and arbiter of the true, the real (and/or natural), and the moral,"[46] without, however, limiting its reach to *modern* Western culture.

Because art as such exists, *burgeons*, beyond and never within the borders of morality, it is intrinsically noncompliant. Transgression serves as testament to art's authenticity, and this transgression often takes place where morality has its strongest hold: on the body itself. Because the corporeal serves a utilitarian function as an instrument of both labor and reproduction, its conformism, its willingness to forgo (ungoverned) gratification, is imperative to the survival of civilization. It is for this reason that morality places restrictions on physical pleasure. In retaliation against these restrictions, masculinism announces the physical, the *sensual*, as the residuum of sublimation; as the vestige of the primal, and therefore genuine, self. This is why sensuality is so

[45] Whiting, Frederick. "The Strange Particularity of the Lover's Preference: Pedophilia, Pornography, and the Anatomy of Monstrosity in *Lolita." American Literature.* Vol. 70, No.4, 1998. Pg. 850.
[46] Dollimore, Jonathan. *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991. Pg. 39.

closely linked to notions of artistic authenticity and why sexual alterity, far from being unnatural or perverse, is often deemed unsublimated or sincere. But this masculinist ambition to de-sublimate the body to recover a primal truth, this blatant will to transgress, does not belong to masculinism alone. In fact, transgression is tied up in the very notion of art itself.

We venerate art when it convinces us to suspend judgment, to relinquish notions of right and wrong or even to embrace what we ought to abhor. Such art calls social and sexual normativity into question, challenging that which we presume to be natural, truthful, and good. This artistic endeavor to undercut morality in the name of sincerity is neither entirely new nor polemical. In his famous 1841 treatise, *Self-Reliance,* Ralph Waldo Emerson condemns conformity and urges opposition:

> On my saying, What have I to do with the sacredness of traditions, if I live wholly from within? My friend suggested – 'But these impulses may be from below, not from above.' I replied, 'They do not seem to me to be such; but if I am the devil's child, I will live then from the devil.' No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature. Good and bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my constitution; the only wrong is what is against it.[47]

Emerson touches on the arbitrariness of morality, the transferability of good and bad, and the inherent rightness of one's inner disposition. This notion that moral prescripts are gratuitous and therefore themselves unsacred, *profane*, presupposes Freud's later theories of sublimation. Emerson and the Transcendentalists, like Freud, identify an essential self that has been modified, de-sexed, through cultural conditioning. Emerson's treatise stresses the imperativeness of introspection to identify and dismiss these modifications and reclaim an autonomous existence. Although it only intimates the part civilization ('the sacredness of traditions') plays in inhibiting the impulses, it goes on to connect nature (constitution) to Nature (wilderness, the antithesis of civilization).

This association between civilization and the sublimation of the impulses, *unfreedom,* is also intimated in Friedrich Nietzsche's reprobation of herd mentality in *The Gay Science:*

[47] Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Self-Reliance.* New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1993. Pg. 21-22.

> Wherever we encounter a morality, we also encounter valuations and an order of rank of human impulses and actions. These valuations and orders of rank are always expressions of the needs of a community and herd: whatever benefits it most – and second most, and third most – that is also considered the first standard for the value of all individuals. Morality trains the individual to be a function of the herd and to ascribe value to himself only as a function. The conditions for the preservation of different communities were very different; hence there were very different moralities. Considering essential changes in the forms of future herds and communities, states and societies, we can prophesy that there will yet be very divergent moralities. Morality is herd instinct in the individual.[48]

Nietzsche posits that the uniqueness, the *authenticity,* of the individual is sacrificed so that the herd or social community might flourish. The individual, lacking introspection, identifies their purpose as a part or function of a whole, dedicating their mechanized existence to service rather than autonomy. This idea of the sublimated individual as a function of or laborer for the communal whole is reiterated in Freud's notion of the performance principle*;* Herbert Marcuse explains that under this principle "men do not live their own lives but perform pre-established functions."[49] The morality ensuring their subservience is necessary only in that it preserves the community; its mandates, the prohibitions against freedom, are otherwise neither fixed nor imperative.

This tacit understanding that morality thwarts or represses not only sexuality but individuality has long inspired rebellion in artists such as André Gide, Vladimir Nabokov and Philip Roth, whose prolific works consistently, predictably, give precedence to sensuality, and often lubricity, over ethicality. That said, it is not the purport of this chapter to affiliate Gide, Nabokov and Roth because of the sexual content of their work, but to align them as a result of the ways in which that sexual content is used to challenge morality and uncover the truth, the *authenticity*, of the unsublimated self.

André Gide's *The Immoralist,* Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita,* and Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater* are all brazenly sexual, capturing often adulterous, often pedophilic carnality in such detail they

[48] Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix for Songs.* Tr. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1974. Pg. 174.
[49] Marcuse, Herbert. *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1974. Pg. 45.

would almost appear crude for crude's sake. But the often grotesqueness of the acts remembered, for memory plays a vital role in each work, allows the writers a unique opportunity to prove that art is beyond morality and the artist's protagonist beyond reproach, even when *in life* the abject hero certainly is not.

The Immoralist, a novella about Michel's discovery of his authentic - latently homosexual, presumably pedophilic - self, is, as John Weightman notes, "so beautifully written, and gives such a subtle and rounded picture of the spoiled, introspective bourgeoisie discovering the 'natural' life and being naively transported by it, that it has a kind of classic quality."[50] And *Lolita,* Nabokov's still controversial masterpiece centered on the abduction and recurrent rape of the "nymph" Dolores Haze, *Lolita*, draws so much attention to the rhetorical sophistication of its narrator that it nearly expunges his otherwise indefensible transgressions. Brian D. Walter explains that Humbert's "lush, poetic descriptions often make it easy to overlook the utter pitilessness of his physical relations with Lolita, effectively extending the reader's natural sympathy for Lolita to embrace him as well by casting both figures – child and rapist – as equal victims of an unspeakable lust."[51] Roth's protagonist is equally deplorable. Mickey Sabbath, the self-described "Whoremonger, Seducer, Sodomist, Abuser of Women, Destroyer of Morals, Ensnarer of Youth"[52] carves a living out of indecency, creating and animating lascivious puppets for his depraved productions. But despite his apparent lack of refinement, Sabbath is as intelligently voluble as Humbert. Able to recite *Hamlet* verbatim, he employs a language and logic so perversely palatable, he is often read as Roth, the U.S.'s most prolific and awarded author, himself.

But why tell such abhorrent stories? Why focus on and obsess over the virile and unsublimated? Why make everything so obviously phallic? "Isn't it tiresome[…]," the looming narrator of *Sabbath's Theater*, like Sabbath, so often presumed to be Roth, asks, "this role of rebel-hero? What an odd time to think of sex as rebellion. Are we back to Lawrence's gamekeeper? At this late hour…What a pathetic, outmoded old crank you are, Mickey Sabbath. The discredited male

[50] Weightman, John. "André Gide and the Homosexual Debate." *The American Scholar,* Vol. 59, No. 4, 1990. Pg. 598.
[51] Walter, Brian D. "Romantic Parody and the Ironic Muse in *Lolita*." *Essays in Literature.* Vol. 22, Iss. 1, 1995. Pg. 14.
[52] Roth, Philip. *Sabbath's Theater.* New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995. Pg. 376.

polemic's last gasp. Even as the bloodiest of all centuries comes to an end, you're out working day and night to create an erotic scandal."[53] The question is whether the accentuation of the erotic is gratuitous or purposeful, whether it is illuminative or unnecessarily pornographic. Ruth R. Wisse challenges us to "substitute the name Philip Roth for that of his protagonist Mickey Sabbath in this passage, and you have a fair and witty put-down of his new novel *Sabbath's Theater*. Some of Roth's critics through the years have indeed charged that he is nothing more than a pornographer, out to create an 'erotic scandal.'"[54] This denouncement, grounded in reader-response criticism, fails to acknowledge that *affect* purposefully fuels the narrative. Inasmuch as *Sabbath's Theater* is about Sabbath's (post)modern immoralism, it is also about its readership's (post)modern reaction to and assessment of the text. If it seems out to create an erotic scandal, it is because we as readers still, at this late hour, feel scandalized and embarrassed by deviant sexuality. It is because we are reading through a moral lens, discriminating between good and bad, high and low, art from a culturally modified perspective.

Eroticism in literature lays bare our attitudes toward sex in general, revealing the extent of our own sublimation; it holds up a mirror. And no matter how progressive or inclusive or accepting we claim to be, sex, itself a mainstay of civilization, continues to abrade us, exciting and inciting us as nothing else can. This is perhaps why sex is so often the subject of seminal literary works: it evidences the extent to which art can loosen morality's grip, revealing a potentially horrifying glimpse of the primal self that knows neither scandalization nor embarrassment. In this, these works verge on the anarchic.

In *Sources of the Self*, a pivotal text on individualism and authenticity, Charles Taylor elucidates the paradox of freedom, first explaining the extent to which Western morality seems to endorse the assertion of self and personal autonomy:

> To talk of universal, natural, or human rights is to connect respect for human life and integrity with the notion of autonomy. It is to conceive people as active cooperators in establishing and ensuring the respect which is due them. And this expressed a central feature

[53] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 345.
[54] Wisse, Ruth R. "Sex, Love & Death – *Sabbath's Theater* by Philip Roth." *Commentary.* New York, Vol. 100, Iss. 6, 1995. Pg. 1.

> of the modern Western moral outlook. This change of form naturally goes along with one in content, with the conception of what it is to respect someone. Autonomy is now central to this. So the Lockean trinity of natural rights includes that to liberty. And for us respecting personality involves as a crucial feature respecting the person's moral autonomy. With the development of the post-Romantic notion of individual difference, this expands to the demand that we give people the freedom to develop their personality in their own way, however repugnant to ourselves and even to our moral sense – the thesis developed so persuasively by J.S. Mill.

But, despite its propagation of natural rights, this morality is inherently prescriptive, controlling. Ultimately, it impedes the moral autonomy it first announces as fundamental. It rescinds its promise of individual liberty in the name of (communal, social) concord, and thus serves as the naysaying mouthpiece of the dominant culture. Taylor notes the irreconcilability of alterity within the dominant culture, correctly identifying inevitable points of contention between individualism and moralism:

> Of course not everyone agrees with Mill's principle, and its full impact on Western legislation has been very recent. But everyone in our civilization feels the force of this appeal to accord people the freedom to develop their own way. The disagreement is over the relation of such things as pornography, or various kinds of permissive sexual behavior, or portrayals of violence, to legitimate development.[55]

Taylor delineates autonomy as the *theoretical* freedom of the individual to think and to act, to *exist,* beyond the moral social structure of which they are a part, developing their own way, to realize and share their own uniqueness. This delineation sees value in difference; concomitantly, though, it, as a mere theoretical construct, admits the unrealizability of *actual* autonomy. Western culture approves of moral autonomy, of difference, but, and herein lies the paradox, not of moral deviation. If there exists, which there invariably does, a morality dictating what kinds of thoughts and acts and existences are too perverse, or too violent, or too *unique* to be permissible, then there is no freedom; there is no autonomy. Instead, there are parameters. There is a cage.

[55] Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989. Pg. 12.

But this cage is justifiable, even necessary. Free societies cannot allow, much less normalize, profanation or adultery, let alone pedophilia or rape, although those acts or inclinations might indicate a certain type of personality or a specific kind of mania unique to the individual. John Weightman stresses this point with a more extreme example of deviant behavior. "Nature," he says, "is useless as a moral criterion, since a homicidal maniac could equally invoke it to justify his undoubtedly inherent impulses."[56] For this reason, freedom must be inhibited, and individualism contained. The only way around these limitations placed on autonomy is transgression, criminality.

It is no wonder, then, that some of the greatest artists have embraced some of the most dissident themes. The Marquis de Sade challenged 18th-century bourgeois morality with his depictions of violent eroticism. Weightman explains that when "the idea of Nature was most fashionable," Sade "stood the Rousseauistic concept of 'good' Nature on its head, and argued with mad conviction that strong individuals have a right, or even a duty, to work out their aggressive natures to the full, particularly as regards sex."[57] D.H. Lawrence was denounced as a flippant pornographer before his work was eventually recognized for its artistry and seriousness (notably by F.R. Leavis in *The Great Tradition*)[58]; Oscar Wilde not only lived openly as a homosexual, but trumpeted homosexuality as both natural and authentic at a time when homosexual intercourse was deemed a criminal act. Incidentally, Wilde was jailed for sodomy in 1895; less incidental, perhaps, is the "close relationship between crime and individualism" that Dollimore insists Wilde "reiterates everywhere."[59] These are just a few famous examples of writers who pushed moral boundaries in the name of personal and artistic freedom; who found in sexual dissidence, and the portrayals thereof, a means to rebel against prescriptive morality and unfreedom, thereby uncovering the unadulterated, *authentic,* self within. This plight of the (adamantly deviant) artist lends itself to the project of masculinism. It is what differentiates the writer's rebellion against cultural conditioning and the sublimation of the instincts from the 'toxic masculinity' espoused by the patriarchal power structure.

[56] "André Gide and the Homosexual Debate." Pg. 594.
[57] *Ibid.*
[58] Cf.: Leavis, F.R. *The Great Tradition.* London: Chatto and Windus, 1948.
[59] *Sexual Dissidence.* Pg. 8.

In his forward to *Lolita,* Martin Amis contends that "Lolita is a cruel book about cruelty."[60] After all, Humbert, the book's repugnant narrator, spends much of the novel detailing how he charmed, tricked and recurrently raped his beloved fourteen-year-old stepdaughter after the fortuitous death of her mother. His actions, if we are to believe his narrative, *are* cruel. Yet John Hollander warns against reading the novel as a reliable confession: "Even to state that the book is *about* a cultivated Eureopean émigré in love with a twelve-year-old girl is misleading: modern readers cannot help but refer such a theme to the wrong novelistic conventions."[61] There is no doubt, however, that Humbert is meant to provoke and affront our moral sensibilities; in this, our adverse reaction is integral to the text itself. Yet our disdain for Humbert does not last. We, too, are eventually charmed; we, too, are eventually deceived. We read *Lolita* and inevitably absolve Humbert. We delight in his incorrigibility and his over-embellished defenses of it. Perhaps this is because Brenda Megerle's claim that "the consensus of Lolita criticism […] that the novel is about art, not sex"[62] somehow resonates. If *Lolita* is about literary artifice rather than sex or cruelty, then it is not only permissible but appropriate to suspend our judgment of Humbert and to delight in his story. Brian Walter notes, "With the voice of a child-rapist as his only tool, Nabokov must persuade the reader […] not to apply social prejudices to his novel, to instead appreciate the work in its particularity."[63] There is then a point in describing the illicit sexual relationship between a barely pubescent child and her lascivious stepfather; alas, the novel is not groundlessly but deliberately dissolute. It asks whether the sexual deviance, the criminality, that would otherwise demand indignation can be overcome or gotten past through artistic ingenuity. As readers, we detach ourselves from the criminal content of Humbert's narrative. This, too, is part of Nabokov's ploy to undermine the moral strictures placed on his characters and audience. Lionel Trilling suggests that we, Nabokov's readers, soon "find ourselves more shocked when we realize that, in the course of reading the novel, we have virtually come to condone the violation it represents."[64] Frederick Whiting warns, however, not to treat this ploy as artistic apathy toward moral concerns:

> Rather than read the novel as the paramount case of artistic and literary critical indifference to moral concerns and sexual politics, I

[60] Amis, Martin. "Introduction." *Lolita.* By Vladimir Nabokov. New York: Everyman's Library, 1992. Pg. ix.
[61] Hollander, John. "The Perilous Power of Nymphets." *The Parisian Review.* Fall, 1956. Pg. 557.
[62] Megerle, Brenda. "The Tantalization of Lolita." *Studies in the Novel.* Vol. 1, 1979. Pg. 338.
[63] "Romantic Parody and the Ironic Muse in *Lolita*." Pg. 8.
[64] Trilling, Lionel. *The Moral Obligation to be Intelligent: Selected Essays.* Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1915. Pg. 362.

> urge that we treat it as exemplary precisely *because of* its engagement with the period's (our period's) anxieties about pedophilia and pornography. Considered in this light, the novel becomes aberrant (visionary, postmodern) in its interrogation of the formalisms – legal, sexual, literary critical […].[65]

At least part of Nabokov's genius is in his ability to position his audience as nascent literary critics and to compel them to analyze both his text and their own understanding of it. He delicately, imperceptibly forces them, forces us, to consider the implications of Humbert's indictment and exoneration and the ways in which they reflect the caprices of our own convictions.

In his short essay "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*," Nabokov recounts his inspiration for the novel:

> The first throb of *Lolita* went through me late in 1939 or early 1940, in Paris, at a time when I was laid up with a severe attack of intercostal neuralgia. As far as I can recall, the initial shiver of inspiration was somehow prompted by a newspaper story about an ape in the Jardin des Plantes, who, after months of coaxing by a scientist, produced the first drawing ever charcoaled by an animal: this sketch showed the bars of the poor creature's cage.[66]

If the ape is recreated in hairy, lumbering Humbert, it is not difficult to identify the cage restricting his freedom, be it sexual or artistic, as morality. Because one must deviate from the morality of a given social structure to sense the presence of limitation, it is no wonder that literature has so often and so ardently taken it upon itself to extirpate the moral code in hopes of unearthing a grain of *authenticity*, which it seems is itself intrinsically linked to that which is hidden or taboo, to that which lies beyond the cage. In *The Politics of Authenticity,* Marshall Berman explains:

> Our society is filled with people who are ardently yearning and consciously striving for authenticity: moral philosophers who are exploring the idea of 'self-realization'; psychiatrists and their patients who are working to develop and strengthen 'ego identity'; artists and writers who gave the word 'authenticity' the cultural force it has today…all bent on creating works and living lives in

[65] "The Strange Particularity of the Lover's Preference: Pedophilia, Pornography, and the Anatomy of Monstrosity in *Lolita.*" Pg. 835.
[66] Nabokov, Vladimir. "On A Book Entitled *Lolita*." *Lolita.* By Vladimir Nabokov. New York: Everyman's Library, 1992. Pg. 329.

> which their deepest, truest selves will somehow be expressed…Countless anonymous men and women all over…are fighting, desperately and against all odds, simply to preserve, to feel, to be themselves.[67]

Authenticity demands that freedom be limitless, but the civilized person is constrained by the system of allowances and prohibitions in which they are metaphorically encaged. They can then never know true freedom or their truest self, because such knowledge is obfuscated by all they have been taught, conditioned, to value and abhor. In his philosophical inquiry into Freud, Herbert Marcuse notes, "The animal man becomes a human being only through a fundamental transformation of his nature, affecting not only the instinctual aims but also the instinctual 'values' – that is, the principles that govern the attainment of aims."[68] To *know thyself*, as the ancient Greek aphorism, not to mention the very notion of authenticity, demands, the civilized person must somehow return to, or (re-)access, their primordial animal state. This would mean renouncing limits to freedom and, ultimately, morality itself. Such a renouncement would, however, come at a cost. As Gilbert Simondon explains in "The Genesis of the Individual," the process of individuation determines one's development, organization and modalities, and "must be considered primordial."[69] The rejection of limits would enable the once sublimated instincts to override the lifetime of cultural conditioning and modification, ultimately allowing carnality to run amok. Marcuse clarifies this concern as an "expectation that that instinctual liberation can lead only to a society of sex maniacs – that is, to no society."[70]

Because there is disagreement 'over the relation of such things as pornography, or various kinds of permissive sexual behavior,' the rendering of deviant sexuality (whether through video, imagery or written text) becomes the target of morality and the basis for limiting freedom. *Carnality must not run amok*! Therefore, it is not surprising that many works whose arguable aim has been authenticity, including D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterly's Lover,* Kate Chopin's *The Awakening,* and James Joyce's *Ulysses,* have recurrently been denounced and even banned for their

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[67] Berman, Marshall. *The Politics of Authenticity: Radical Individualism and the Emergence of Modern Society.* London: Allen & Unwin, 1970. Pg. 325.
[68] *Eros and Civilization.* Pg. 12.
[69] Simondon, Gilbert. "The Genesis of the Individual." *Incorporations.* Eds. K. Crary & S. Kwinter. Cambridge: Zone Books, 1992. Pg. 300.
[70] *Eros and Civilization.* Pg. 201.

pornographic content. After all, as Jonathon Dollimore aptly notes in his exploration of the lives and works of André Gide and Oscar Wilde, there is an "authenticity of deviant desire"[71] – a truth, an *art,* in the forbidden.

This endeavor to uncover authenticity traces back to the Greek assertion of self and, more recently, the Decadent movement in literature. David Weir observes that the trend toward decadent themes in European literature of the *fin-de-siecle* era, including sickness, decay, perversion, artificiality and aestheticism, flourished from about 1880 until 1914.[72] Gordon A. Schulz clarifies that these themes, though seemingly inimical, also "portray the liberating potential of individual freedom and the antisocial potential of individual freedom unmodulated by communal ambitions and ideals."[73] The Decadent movement's mantra, *L'art pour l'art* – or art for art's sake, drew from Alexander Baumgarten's understanding of aesthetics as that "pertaining to beauty and art."[74] Already by the middle of the eighteenth century, Baumgarten stood in opposition to the influence of reason on Western thought, maintaining that "not reason but sensuousness [*Sinnlichkeit*] is constitutive of aesthetic truth or falsehood. What sensuousness recognizes, or can recognize, as true, aesthetics can represent as true, even if reason rejects it as untrue."[75] This aestheticism continued to flourish across Europe as writers like Søren Kierkegaard integrated its main themes into their own theoretical constructs. In his influential work *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments,* Kierkegaard links the aesthetic stage of existence to ideas that masculinism would later repurpose, including sensual primacy and flight from boredom, *ennui*.[76]

This search for aesthetic truth is punctuated across literary movements, trends, and traditions. We can trace it to Transcendentalist works like *Self-Reliance* (excerpted above). Its reach is equally evident in the works of British Romantic poets, including John Keats, whose final lines in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" personify the insensate artifact as a purveyor of truth and beauty. Keats imagines

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[71] *Sexual Dissidence.* Pg. 13.
[72] Cf.: Weir, David. *Decadence and the Making of Modernism.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993. Pg. 3-4.
[73] Schulz, Gordon A. "Guilty Man and Tragic Man in Decadent Tales of 'Fin-De-Siècle' Europe." *International Journal of Psychoanalytic Self Psychology.* 4:1-20, 2009. Pg. 18.
[74] *Eros and Civilization.* Pg. 181.
[75] Baumgarten, Alexander. "Aesthetik." *Baumgarten.* Ed. Bernhard Poppe. Bonn: A.G., 1907. Pg. 42.
[76] Cf. Kierkegaard, Søren. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments, Vol. I.* Ed. and Tr. by Edward V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

the urn professing to mankind: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty, - that is all / Ye know on earth and all Ye need to know" (49-50). The correlation of truth and beauty inevitably severs truth from reality. This is an important conceptual development for masculinism in that it, too, eventually seeks truth beyond what is real, logical or factual and instead roots its quest for its own version of beauty, for authenticity and freedom, in the realm of pleasure, fantasy and play.

Integral to aestheticism and sensuousness is the idea of play outlined in Friedrich Schiller's 1795 *Briefe über die aesthetische Erziehung des Menschen* [*Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*]. In the letters, Schiller asserts, "Denn, um es endlich auf einmal herauszusagen, der Mensch spielt nur, wo er in voller Bedeutung des Wortes Mensch ist, und er ist nur da ganz Mensch, wo er spielt": man only plays where he is entirely human, and he is only entirely human where he plays. Schiller contends, however, that man is powerless to develop "harmony of being," because he is only able to imagine himself as a fragment of the whole; he only ever hears "the monotonous whirl of the wheel which he turns."[77] He is isolated from play, *Spiel*, and is instead fully consumed by the tedium of his labor, of his drudgery. His identity is thus formed by work (reality) rather than play (pleasure). Schiller's suggestion that *Spiel* is sacrificed to function, that man is somehow mechanized, dehumanized, presupposes both Nietzsche's notions of herd instinct and Freud's theories of sublimation.

This notion of play is perhaps more obviously embedded in masculinist texts that center on the sexual (*Sabbath's Theater*) rather than the sensual (*The Immoralist*). In such texts, play assumes a twofold meaning: on the one hand, it is an amusement, a (deviant) sexual act; on the other, it is a performance, a theatrical act or affectation. In this regard, play can be seen as the manifestation of dissidence and dissemblance, the masculinist stratagem of subversion. It is also invariably related to Freud's notions of pleasure and fantasy by which masculinist characters are driven. Marcuse clarifies, "Freud singles out phantasy as one mental activity that retains a high degree of freedom from the reality principle even in the sphere of the developed consciousness."[78] Play, like pleasure itself, represents a respite from reality, from unfreedom.

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[77] Schiller, Friedrich. *The Aesthetic Letters, and the Philosophical Letters.* Tr. J. Weiss. Boston: Little Brown, 1845. Pg. 66-67.

[78] *Eros and Civilization.* Pg. 140.

Additionally, play is at least tangentially linked to Susan Sontag's later definition of camp. After all, fantasy and camp represent a break from the monotony of the work indicative of Freud's performance principle. This intermission from function, this seemingly innocuous leisure, has radical implications. In *Psychological Types* (1921), Carl Jung sees play as a potential "release from repression" which could give rise to a "depreciation of the hitherto highest values," a "catastrophe of culture," even "barbarism."[79] Civilization, reliant on man's willingness to 'ascribe value to himself only as a function,' calls on morality to keep his play impulse in check. The repression of play *is* the repression of the individual; it is what creates and preserves the herd mentality necessary for cultural longevity. The anarchic potential of play and the perceived truth of sensuousness therefore lend themselves to an artistic freedom that would demand rebellion.

The Decadent movement amalgamates these various theoretical constructs, aligning the sensual, the sexual, with play and revolt with (artistic) freedom. This will to rebel, whether real or imagined, has, according to Marcuse, always served as a "refuge of defamed humanity."[80] It makes sense then that the Decadents, and subsequently the masculinists, should see themselves as much a part of an insurgence as a movement.

Within the Decadent movement and aesthetic philosophy, we see the individual at odds with the society in which he is embedded. Wallace Fowlie explains that philosophers like Nietzsche and artists like Gide (both of whom were contemporaries of the Decadent movement) "see man caught between […] two systems, one divine and one strongly adulterated, and, rather than accepting the adulteration, finding in himself his own divinity, his own divinely inherited status, and setting himself up as the one not to be offended by his own deeds and his own thoughts."[81] They find in themselves that which was previously sought in religion: sanctity, perfection, and eternity. Adulteration becomes truth and truth becomes art. In *The Gay Science,* Nietzsche maintains, "The individual becomes convinced that he can do just about everything and *can manage almost any role,* and everybody experiments with himself, improvises, makes new experiments, enjoys his

[79] Jung, Carl. *Psychological Types.* Tr. H. Godwin Baynes. New York: Harcourt Bryce, 1926. Pg. 192.
[80] *Eros and Civilization.* Pg. xxi.
[81] Fowlie, Wallace. *André Gide: His Life and Art.* New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965. Pg.50.

experiments; all nature ceases and becomes art."[82] We see this in Michel's experiment with freedom, and, later, in Humbert's experiment with nymphancy, and, even later, in Mickey Sabbath's experiment, or experimentation, with self. Though of the three works, Gide's is the only one that can realistically be said to belong to the Decadent movement, each contains the major themes of the era, again: sickness, decay, perversion, artificiality and aestheticism. This is significant in that it links masculinist works to the Decadent tradition of art for art's sake and renders masculinist themes and narratives indicative not of reality, but of (artistic) authenticity.

In her exploration of French modernism and *The Immoralist*, Anna-Louisa Milne explains that "truth and naturalness are what lie beyond the subject as a goal to be strived towards."[83] The subject, to yield truth, must push the boundaries of convention; it must not compromise, be compromised, or acquiesce to the social values that would otherwise restrict it. Marcuse notes, "Groups and group ideals, the philosophies, the works of art and literature that still express without compromise the fears and hopes of humanity stand against the prevailing reality principle: they are its absolute denunciation."[84] Even though art allows Michel to confess his captivation with the Arab boys, Humbert to fondly recount his violations against Lolita, and Sabbath to desecrate the grave of his last lover, it cannot be immoral; it can only be true *in itself*. It therefore exists beyond the reality binding the individual to morality and law, lingering over and above the cage, *theoretically* out of reach from judgment and persecution and indifferent to its own approbation.

Martin Amis insists, "Even sophisticated readers still think Nabokov had something to feel guilty about. Great novels are shocking; and then, after the shock dies down, you get aftershocks."[85] This would explain why each of the novels contains a built-in defense of the protagonists and their infractions. In the preface to *The Immoralist,* Gide offers:

> If I had intended my hero as an example, it must be granted I did anything but succeed; the handful of readers who ventured to interest themselves in Michel's story did so in order to vilify him

[82] *The Gay Science.* Pg. 303.
[83] Milne, Anna-Louise. "Gide's Polymorphous Perversity, or French Modernism's Arrested Development." *The Romanic Review.* Vol. 99, No. 1-2, 2008. Pg. 116.
[84] *Eros and Civilization.* Pg. 105.
[85] "Introduction." Pg. xviii.

> with all the force of their own righteousness. […] But I wanted to write this book neither as an indictment nor as an apology, and I have taken care not to pass judgment. […] I do believe that many minds have been greatly disinclined to…conclude – and that to state a problem properly is not to suppose it solved in advance. I am reluctant to use the word "problem" here. To tell the truth, in art there are no problems for which the work of art is not the sufficient solution.[86]

Though Gide adamantly refuses to apologize for or to indict his protagonist, he certainly seems compelled to account for Michel's scandalous break from conformity. This compulsion to justify carries over into the novel's introduction, written as a letter from Michel's friend and confidante to Monsieur D.R., Président du Conseil:

> What will you think of our friend? Moreover, what did I think of him myself? Are we simply to condemn him, rejecting as useless capacities which evidence of such cruelty? – But more than one man today, I fear, would venture to recognize himself in this narrative. Can we accommodate so much intelligence, so much strength – or must we refuse them any place among us?[87]

"The letter," Robert M. Fagley explains, "gives evidence to already of four values held in high esteem for men in French bourgeois society: intelligence, strength, a strong work ethic, and respect for one's duty to the state."[88] The recipient, Monsieur D.R., embodies French bourgeois society and its values, and, as such an embodiment, it is he who holds the power to either condemn Michel or reintegrate him into the social structure Michel abandoned in his quest for freedom. In the passage, Gide reveals the hypocrisy, the insincerity, of the bourgeoisie so willing to judge Michel but not itself, and in doing so adroitly thumbs his nose at the system of values Fagley details. It is a strategic defense, but also a tacit accusation: 'more than one man' would recognize themselves in Michel's narrative, in his deference to his baser impulses. Essentially, the letter expresses the almost religious sentiment that no man is beyond reproach and that claiming to be is itself both reprehensible and insincere. In a surprising turn, it also correlates Michel's iniquity, presumably rooted in the homosexual, the *feminine*, with the bourgeois extolment of strength and intelligence.

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[86] Gide, André. *The Immoralist.* Tr. Richard Howard. New York: Vintage Books, 1970. Pg. xiii-xiv.
[87] *Ibid.* Pg. 3.
[88] Fagley, Robert M. "Narrating (French) Masculinities: Building Male Identity in André Gide's *The Immoralist.*" *The Journal of Men's Studies.* Vol. 14, No. 1, 2006. Pg. 82.

In addition, the letter draws attention to Michel's need for an audience. His friend who writes Monsieur D.R. is one of three companions who bear witness to Michel's story, and who, Louis A. MacKenzie keenly observes, "are made to confront their own inability to judge," an inability that signals the very notion of judgment as "an important issue for Gide."[89] Gide makes Michel's companions ambivalent about how to process Michel's story by making them complicit in it. While engaged listening might not equate amnesty, it does require a level of empathy and understanding that could lead to amnesty, absolution, and perhaps even condonation.

Like Gide, Nabokov defends his work in the equivalent to a preface, his short essay "On a Book Entitled *Lolita,"* as well as in the novel itself. "*Lolita,"* Nabokov professes, "has no moral in tow. For me a work of fiction exists only insofar as it affords me what I shall bluntly call aesthetic bliss, that is a sense of being somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm."[90] The novel is not meant to be didactic; it has no lesson to engrain, no warning to impart. Though it details an abhorrent criminal act, the sexual violation of a minor, it offers no judgment of the criminal. Instead, it employs various literary strategies that encourage the reader to both titter at and sympathize with its incorrigible protagonist. The first action is to destabilize the narrative.

In "Memory, Consciousness, and Time in Nabokov's *Lolita,"* Olga Hasty points out that the accuracy of Humbert's story is compromised by the ineptitude of John Ray, the editor commissioned to write the forward to Humbert's memoir: "Ray's uselessness as an editor of Humbert's story thus allows Nabokov to defuse right from the start the authority of social-minded criticism over his novel."[91] Because Ray's work is sloppy and unscrupulous, the reader cannot, or at least should not, take his manuscript (or his edits to Humbert's manuscript) at face value. Further undermining the reliability of the narrative is the fact that it takes place in the past and is therefore distorted by time and memory.

[89] MacKenzie, Louis A. "The Language of Excitation in Gide's *L'Immoraliste. Romance Quarterly.* Vol. 37, Iss. 3, 1990. Pg. 309.
[90] "On a Book Entitled *Lolita."* Pg. 332-333.
[91] Hasty, Olga. "Memory, Consciousness, and Time in Nabokov's *Lolita." Kronoscope.* Vol. 4, Iss. 2, 2004. Pg. 17.

Additionally, Humbert admits to suffering intermittent breaks from reality. At times, he is a self-professed madman: "The reader will regret to learn that soon after my return to civilization I had another bout with insanity (if to melancholia and a sense of insufferable oppression that cruel term must be applied)."[92] It is no coincidence that civilization, the embodiment of morality, is what drives Humbert insane. He is made neurotic by its failed efforts to sublimate and repress. But this madness further diminishes his trustworthiness. His story is, as Amis notes, shocking, but not because it is entirely real or believable, but because we are led to assume that at least part of it is. However, we are left in the dark, unable to discern between what is remembered and what is imagined, unable to differentiate between Humbert's delusions and his lived experiences.

Humor also dissuades us from judging Humbert too harshly, or perhaps too fairly, depending on which parts of the story we are most willing to believe. In his "aggressively rhetorical self-defense," which Walter finds "motivated entirely by the likelihood of a hostile audience,"[93] Humbert attempts to deemphasize the harm of pedophilia, using art as grounds for immunity:

> Ladies and gentleman of the jury, the majority of sex-offenders that hanker for some throbbing, sweet-moaning, physical but not necessarily coital, relation with a girl-child, are innocuous, inadequate, passive, timid strangers who merely ask the community to allow them to pursue their practically harmless, so-called aberrant behavior, their little hot wet private acts of sexual deviation without the police and society cracking down on them. […] Emphatically, no killers are we. Poets never kill.[94]

The ridiculousness of Humbert's request that the 'jury' (we, the readers of his memoir) exonerate child molesters and rapists and allow them to pursue their 'hot wet private acts' without persecution is intentionally absurd. It draws attention to the fact that Humbert is unsound, unreliable. This is Nabokov's version of play, for clearly Humbert cannot be serious. He is practicing poetic license, and we are being tricked. Or are we? Walter suggests:

> Nabokov's ironic narrative strategy – to reassert the writer's authority by setting his speaker completely at the mercy of his

[92] Nabokov, Vladimir. *Lolita.* New York: Everyman's Library, 1992. Pg. 36.
[93] "Romantic Parody and the Ironic Muse in *Lolita*." Pg. 5.
[94] *Ibid.* Pg. 93.

> audience – turns the reader into Humbert's confessor, the only available agent for his absolution. This relationship puts Humbert in a precarious position with his audience. He must defend himself against charges of criminal perversion, but he must also retain the interest of an audience who might well have been piqued only by his account's lurid reputation. Humbert thus performs a difficult balancing act: he teases the reader with the forebodings and suggestions of explicitness while indulging himself in "digressions" that may at first seem extraneous but which are crucial to his self-defense.[95]

Rather than writing an audience into his work as Gide does, Nabokov unambiguously draws his *actual* readership into the novel. This is the true test of his craft: to see if he can convince *us,* his ever-changing confessors, of the harmlessness of Humbert's actions.

In anticipation of an unknown audience with unknown values, Humbert later changes his defense tactic when describing his first night with Lolita at the Enchanted Hunters. He no longer asks for free rein for all 'practically harmless' sex offenders. Instead, he requests that his audience pardon him, and him alone, on the basis of his initial vision of self-restraint:

> Let me explain. I was not unduly disturbed by her self-accusatory innuendos. I was still firmly resolved to pursue my policy of sparing her purity by operating only in the stealth of night, only upon a completely anesthesized little nude. Restraint and reverence were still my motto – even if that 'purity' (incidentally, thoroughly debunked by modern science) had been slightly damaged through some juvenile erotic experience, no doubt homosexual, at that accursed camp of hers.[…]We are not surrounded in our enlightened era by little slave flowers that can be casually plucked between business and bath as they used to be in the days of the Romans; and we do not, as dignified Orientals did in still more luxurious times, use tiny entertainers fore and aft between the mutton and the rose sherbet. The whole point is that the old link between the adult world and the child world has been completely severed nowadays by new customs and laws.[96]

He had intended to behave, that is if 'operating' on a drugged and naked twelve-year-old girl can be considered good behavior. He rationalizes his deviance with his determination that notions of

[95] "Romantic Parody and the Ironic Muse in *Lolita*." Pg. 8.
[96] *Ibid.* Pg. 131.

right and wrong are unfixed, that they are contingent on the morality of specific historical eras. For the Romans, sex with underage girls, with 'slave flowers,' was not a crime or indiscretion but a prerogative. *Dignified* 'Orientals' offered nymphs as entertainment between courses. Humbert insists that neither the Romans nor the Orientals were *wrong* in their treatment of young girls; but, because he recognizes that 'our enlightened era,' our specific historical moment, sees things differently, he must bury his urges to avoid prosecution, condemnation. That Humbert must suppress his urges does not infer that they are in any way unnatural. In fact, based on the masculinist adherence to decadence and aestheticism, it is fitting to assert the contrary: that Humbert must suppress his urges infers their naturalness, for that which is prohibited or rendered taboo must be *authentic.* After all, noncompliance is testament to its own *naturalness*.

In *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture,* Catherine Belsey elaborates on this fluctuation in values that Humbert touches on:

> A text might be seen as a delicate ensemble of signifying practices which bears witness to the undecidability, the polyphony, the heterogeneity of meaning at a specific historical moment. That heterogeneity is the evidence that the signified is always unstable, subject to change. It demonstrates that the meaning of wife, or mistress, say, meanings lived out in people's bodies, in people's experience, is not fixed by nature, or even by culture, but is always a potential site of struggle, which is a struggle simultaneously for meanings and bodies and experience.[97]

People, with their idiosyncrasies and their unique, and often objectionable, sexual preferences, can never truly coalesce under a given nature or culture. Meanings about their preferences cannot be fixed in words or signifiers, because the range of desire(s) would make those meanings impossible to pin down or contain. Even the language of morality, those words pieced together to prescribe and proscribe certain behaviors, is itself volatile. Knowledge of this volatility prevents us from conclusively condemning Humbert, whose meanings (lived out, experienced, on the body and so loosely, clumsily translated in writing) can never be entirely understood or appreciated. We are bound to remain strangers to each other's preferences and meanings; there is no (sexual) norm, no fixed way of being from which to deviate. There is only disparity.

[97] Belsey, Catherine. *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994. Pg. 13-14.

Yet sexual deviation relies on sexual normativity, on the designation, however arbitrary, of socially permissible acts and behaviors. Knowledge of such normativity explains why Ray employs yet another rhetorical strategy in his defense of Humbert. When in the forward Ray calls upon Humbert's audience to 'be prim and proper,' he is asking us to assess the story from the perspective of a moral conformist who, unlike Humbert, believes in the essential and therefore irrefutable distinction between good and bad, right and wrong. We are implored to believe that, despite his ultimate lack of control, Humbert did endeavor to live a moral existence. Ray insists, "Humbert Humbert tried hard to be good. Really and truly, he did."[98] But we know that Humbert only tried to be good to avoid retribution. It is obvious that his attempt to assume an *inauthentic* posture, to dissemble, has nothing to do with contrition and everything to do with subversion. It goes without saying that he seeks exoneration not because of his good intentions, but because he feels the moral system delineating sexual normativity is to blame for his categorization as abnormal, perverse, *criminal*. And for all his empty apologies, we know Humbert repents nothing.

In fact, he sees himself the victim of a multi-pronged attack. In a torrential, untenable assertion, Humbert shields himself behind his lunacy and, most significantly, his artistry, while concomitantly implicating in his deviant desire the one person he should not: the object of his desire, the nymph, Dolores Haze. He reasons:

> You have to be an artist and a madman, a creature of infinite melancholy, with a bubble of hot poison in your loins and a super-voluptuous flame permanently aglow in your subtle spine (oh, how you have to cringe and hide!), in order to discern at once, by ineffable signs – the slightly feline outline of a cheekbone, the slenderness of a downy limb, and other indices which despair and shame and tears of tenderness forbid me to tabulate – the little deadly demon among the wholesome other children; *she* stands unrecognized by them and unconscious herself of her fantastic power.[99]

He is victim to the power Lolita holds over him. He is certainly not to blame for his unique ability to discern the ineffable signs of her seduction and his own undoing. Though inconsonant with our

[98] *Lolita.* Pg. 20.
[99] *Ibid.* Pg. 18.

moral sensibilities and want to protect children above all others, his assertion speaks to the aesthetic correlation between transgressive art and artistic authenticity. It is through his artistry, his somber genius, that Humbert is able to recognize the truth in Lolita. He perceives her 'fantastic power' not through rationalization but through sensation, in his loins, subtle spine. The artist, he intimates, does not reason but feels. To access this otherwise stifled awareness and de-sublimated sensuality, one must be a rebel, a visionary, a *decadent*. Surely an inspired artist whose genius demands transgression is worthy of leniency.

We find the same plea for clemency in *Sabbath's Theater.* Sabbath has largely been perceived as one of, and possibly the, most despicable of Roth's protagonists. He is the consummate nonconformist who seems to acknowledge normative actions and behaviors in order to openly, *shamelessly,* refute them. He marries to betray his wives, teaches to seduce his students, *lives* to horrify his audiences. He is introspective like Michel, quick-witted like Humbert, and coldly incisive like Roth himself. Sabbath, the former puppeteer of the appropriately named Indecent Theater, acts and reacts on impulse, never taking his performances or their receptions too seriously. He deems his acts comical, harmless, even when they require his reprisal as the profligate philanderer. For these acts are play – *Spiel* – as well as theatrics. While they are intended to mimic, to tease, reality, they are certainly not meant to be taken as real. Their verisimilitude merely underscores the artistry of the performer at play.

In *Sabbath's Theater*, we see the development of Roth's thematic focus and his capacity to hone it. Robert Greenberg maintains that Roth's early work centers on an immaturity that is both calculated and incendiary. He argues that in the initial stages of Roth's career, Roth starts "to envision a semiautobiographical literature formed from baseness, messiness, and 'immaturity,' a subversive approach to society that seeks to invert conventional theories and shock expectations about the appropriate material, motives, and goals of art."[100] In *Sabbath's Theater*, we see this vision realized. The callowness Greenberg identifies could just as easily be called play; it is Roth, *Sabbath*, deriding a system whose prescripts are incompatible with art and artistic freedom.

[100] "Transgression in the Fiction of Philip Roth." Pg. 491.

In "'Tragedy wrought to its uttermost': Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater* and the Art of Dying," Joel Diggory highlights this consolidation of performance and play by drawing on Susan Sontag's "Notes on Camp." Diggory explains that the essay "was among the first to popularize 'the theatricalization of experience' characteristic of a self-conscious postmodern sensibility that understands "Being-as-Playing-a-Role."[101] While the idea of "performing selves"[102] certainly is not new (we are all familiar with Jacques's famous "All the world's a stage" monologue in Shakespeaere's *As You Like It*), it takes on new meaning when interpreted through Sontag's work on camp and queerness. Camp, which Sontag defines as "a sensibility that revels in artifice, stylization, theatricalization, irony, playfulness, and exaggeration rather than content," acts as "a solvent for morality" that "neutralizes moral indignation and sponsors playfulness."[103] Through his playful, if not entirely innocuous, performances, Sabbath endeavors to (re)gain the autonomy (sexual) conformity impedes. His friend, Norman, recognizes Sabbath's acts as the all-too-familiar revolt of man against society. He ridicules Sabbath, "We are determined by our society to such an extent that we can only live as human beings if we turn anarchic. Isn't that the pitch? Hasn't that always been the pitch."[104]

For Sabbath, it certainly is the pitch. Diggory notes, "The vitality of someone's selfhood is […] measurable by that person's ability to remake their identity, by their capacity for sustaining cognitive dissonance."[105] Identity is not who you are, but who you can become. In the introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Philip Roth,* Timothy Parrish also espouses this idea, noting, "For Roth, the self takes its form through experimentation and should be perceived as a type of fiction. Asserting one's identity is, as Roth understands it, always a transgressive act"[106]; the authentic self is then not only deviant but malleable, volatile.

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[101] Diggory, Joel. "Tragedy wrought to its uttermost": Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater* and the Art of Dying. *Philip Roth Studies.* Vol. 12, No. 2, 2016. Pg. 54.

[102] The phrase is usually attributed to Richard Poirier's 1970 collection of essays in *The Performing Self.* Cf. Poirier, Richard. *The Performing Self: Compositions and Decompositions in the Languages of Contemporary Life.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971.

[103] Sontag, Susan. *Against Interpretation and Other Essays.* London: Penguin Classics, 2009. Pg. 290.

[104] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 347.

[105] "Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater* and the Art of Dying." Pg. 54.

[106] Parrish, Timothy. "Introduction: Roth at mid-career." *The Cambridge Companion to Philip Roth.* Ed. Timothy Parrish. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Erudite and exceptionally articulate, it is no wonder that Sabbath, like so many of Roth's alter-egos, is employed, for a time, as a university professor. His employment is cut short, however, when the "ball-busting" feminist administrator, Dr. Kakumoto, discovers tape recordings of some of his more sexually explicit phone calls with his student, Kathy Goolsbee - "a freckled redhead with the shiksa overbite, a hefty, big-limbed scholarship kid from Hazelton, PA […], a baker's daughter […] who pronounced *can* "kin."[107] In Kathy Goolsbee, we see traces of George Bernard Shaw's Eliza Doolittle, the uneducated but ready to learn protégé of a social superior. We also see the power dynamic that would put Sabbath at odds with a progressive university administration eager to address sexual harassment in its policymaking. After all, it is clear that Sabbath has abused his position and exploited the trust of his student. We are, however, nevertheless asked to indulge him. When the tapes reveal a planned tryst, solicited by the injudicious student, we are asked to suspend judgment and refrain from jumping to conclusions about Sabbath:

> Not too hard on Sabbath, Reader. Neither the turbulent inner talkathon, nor the superabundance of self-subversion, nor the years of reading about death, nor the bitter experience of tribulation, loss, hardship and grief make it any easier for a man of his type (perhaps for a man of any type) to get good use out of his brain when confronted by such an offer once, let alone when it is made repeatedly by a girl a third his age with an occlusion like Gene Tierney's in *Laura.* Don't be too hard on Sabbath for beginning to begin to think that maybe she was *telling the truth:* that she *had* left the tape in the library accidentally, that it *had* fallen into the Kakumoto's hand accidentally…[108]

Interestingly, we are not asked to forgive Sabbath for having phone sex, and expecting actual sex, with his student; instead, we are asked to excuse him for believing that the tapes had *accidentally* fallen in the wrong hands. His situation warrants our sympathy because it is merely a case of a man acting on a man's *natural* desires. Our placatory narrator muses, "So little in life is knowable, Reader – don't be hard on Sabbath if he gets things wrong. […] Many farcical, illogical, incomprehensible transactions are subsumed by the manias of lust."[109] In this lax dismissal, there

[107] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 210
[108] *Ibid.* Pg. 230-231.
[109] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 232-233.

are obvious reiterations of Humbert's own extenuation of wayward desire. There is a tacit exemption for the manias of the maniacal artist.

Each of the novels asks us to absolve the protagonists of any wrongdoing, to exculpate them even when their actions have hurt others and affronted our values. This can be ascribed to more than synchronicity, coincidence. To the same extent that transgression denotes authenticity, absolution for transgression evidences artistry. Greenberg notes that for Roth there now exists "an explicit burden of moral/ethical sensibility in his work," an attempt, not unlike that of writers such as Norman Mailer, "to achieve authenticity and artistic power through cultural and psychological transgression."[110] This same burden is apparent in *The Immoralist* and *Lolita.* We, as the presumably principled readers of these works, become part of, if not complicit in, this masculinist upending of morality through transgression. Our absolution speaks to the success of its (artistic, literary) revolt.

Although each of the masculinist writers included in this inquiry aims toward transgressive authenticity in their work, André Gide is the most explicitly devoted to the Decadent trend to couple sexual transgression with sensate truth. This is no doubt partially related to his complicated association with Oscar Wilde, the literary flamboyant whose work declares the naturalness of deviant sexuality. Although Gide, like Wilde, eventually endorses homosexuality in a more forthright manner (*Corydon*, for instance, presents a clear case for Greek love), his early work is more introspective, nuanced. It, particularly *The Immoralist*, fixates on the aesthetic will to truth realized through the combination of *sensuality* and disobedience. Wallace Fowlie observes that "what might have been considered indiscretion was used by Gide as part of the truth he sought endlessly."[111] Ernst Erich Noth echoes Fowlie's estimation, noting, "It cannot be denied that Gide has accomplished his destiny as a radically 'free man' in his quest for truth."[112]

Because *The Immoralist* is so obviously rooted in the concerns of the Decadent movement that come to inform masculinism, particularly its preoccupation with authenticity, the last few pages

[110] "Transgression in the Fiction of Philip Roth." Pg. 487-488.
[111] Fowlie, Wallace. "Who was André Gide?" *The Sewanee Review.* Vol. 60, No. 4, 1952. Pg. 615.
[112] Noth, Ernst Erich. "André Gide." *Books Abroad.* Vol. 25, No. 2, 1951. Pg. 108.

of this chapter will center on that work. This is not to imply that *Lolita* and *Sabbath's Theater* somehow repudiate or fail to fulfill the Decadent aim to uncover truth in transgression. Instead, by honing the Decadent themes in *The Immoralist*, I hope to show where and how masculinism finds its footing among turn-of-the-century literature, thereby locating the moment of its artistic inception.

Masculinist works, like Decadent art and literature, see modern, sublimating social structures as an impediment to artistic and sexual freedom. It is not surprising then that *The Immoralist* starts not with Michel's eventual experiment with freedom, but with his study of unsublimated ancient civilizations; doing so suggests the masculinist antagonism between man and morality he eventually comes to embody.

The novella opens with Michel a dutiful son and skilled scholar, the epitome of bourgeois values and Protestant correctness. Dedicated to the study of ancient civilizations, he finds solace in the scrupulous interpretation and translation of old books about dead cities considers himself content in his profession. Soon into his career, he agrees to marry Marceline, a distant cousin, to please his father on his deathbed. In this gesture, he feels momentarily validated as a man and envisages himself fulfilling his patriarchal duties to family and country. This imagined contentment, eventually shown to be the 'self-repression of the repressed individual,' is rooted in his father's distinguished career and his mother's Huguenot austerity. For it has been engrained in Michel to do the right thing, to conform. In order to subvert the morality that has shaped him, however, Michel's identity must be *unfixed,* dissociated. For this to happen, he must commit to himself; he must embrace his narcissism.

In her extensive exploration of the dissociation that leads to Michel's narcissism, "Gide's *"L' Immoraliste* and the Psychology of Self," Tara Collington suggests reading Michel's narrative through a Kohutian lens. While describing Michel's pathology as narcissistic is neither new nor polemical, he *is* a narcissist, Collington's work provides an interesting insight into the term and its disparate usages. She begins with Freud's division of the term into two categories: a primary narcissism in which the infant is unable to differentiate between self and other and a secondary narcissism in which an individual's maturation is interrupted, resulting in megalomania. Both

categories, she clarifies, are "profoundly linked to sexual identity and relationships with external objects."[113] With the former , according to Freud's "On Narcissism: An Introduction," "the persons who are concerned with a child's feeding, care, and protection become his earliest sexual objects,"[114] but are later replaced by more appropriate objects of desire. With the latter, however, individuals suffering from sexual disturbances, whom Freud describes as "perverts and homosexuals," do not take their primary caregivers, their mothers, as love-objects. Instead, they are self-eroticizing. Freud maintains, "They are plainly seeking *themselves* as a love-object, and are exhibiting a type of object-choice which must be termed 'narcissistic.'"[115] This explanation suggests a direct and rather unremarkable connection between self-love and loving another, a "love-object," who physically resembles oneself. Homosexuality, in this clearly problematic formulation, can be seen as the manifestation of narcissism. Collington, then, rightfully warns that this Freudian definition of narcissism could "limit the parameters of study to a narrowly-focused debate about Michel's sexual orientation."[116]

Heinz Kohut's definition, which though related to Freud's "considers narcissism in terms of the functioning of an individual's whole identity, which naturally includes various aspects of sexuality and sexual orientation but does not privilege them,"[117] allows for a more comprehensive analysis of the transitional phase in the development of self. Kohut identifies two types of transferences that take place in early childhood: the idealized selfobject the child wishes to emulate and the admiring selfobject they wish to please. In the phase between adolescence and adulthood, during which the solidification of self-identity occurs, the selfobject functions are internalized. This process allows for "a balanced sense of self esteem" and "a desire to be fully integrated into society."[118] When the process is delayed or disrupted, however, the individual experiences a fragmentation of self that can result in a narcissistic personality disorder.

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[113] Collington, Tara. "Gide's *L'Immoraliste* and the Psychology of Self." *Dalhousie French Studies.* Vol. 79, 2007. Pg. 56.
[114] Freud, Sigmund. "On Narcissism: An Introduction." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works.* Vol. 14. Ed. and Tr. James Strachey. Toronto: Clark Irwin, 1975. Pg. 87.
[115] *Ibid.* Pg. 88.
[116] "Gide's *L'Immoraliste* and the Psychology of Self." Pg. 58.
[117] "Gide's *L'Immoraliste* and the Psychology of Self." Pg. 58.
[118] *Ibid.* Pg. 59.

Collington argues that because Michel is in a "doubly transitional phase" at the start of the novella in that he has lost his father and just married, he must recreate "a series of selfobject relationships in order to bolster his fragile sense of self."[119] He finds these relationships on his honeymoon trip with Marceline, during which he is further destabilized by illness.

When Michel comes down with tuberculosis en route to 'the Orient,' he is forced into a primordial survival mode. He turns his intellectual rigor toward a new subject: his body. During his convalescence in Biskra, he surrounds himself with the robust Arab boys whose youth and health he both envies and desires. Collington finds that these boys can be understood as projective identifications, by which the undesirable aspects of Michel's identity, "illness, contagion, weakness," are "displaced onto an external object."[120] Rather than mere objects of desire, they become idealized selfobjects, models of physical health to inspire Michel's own recuperation. Apart from their health, Michel identifies in these boys the facets of himself sublimation has made dormant: the unselfconscious spontaneity, the reckless abandon. In them, he discovers authenticity.

Using the boys as a point of comparison, Michel becomes hyper-aware of the bodily sensations once masked by social decorum and realizes that he has an identity apart from his performing, public self. In "Andre Gide, The Critical Novelist," Adolphe-Jacques Dickman explains that Michel "has now turned to life and health, and to the instincts that are most spontaneous for the expression of the self. He wants to renounce nothing. As he looks forward for more life, he has come to consider instinct as its purest expression. The worst instincts seem to him the most sincere, since they are the most unadulterated."[121] Michel finds his public self to be a misrepresentation, the insincere guise of a man of principle. In his convalescence, he allows sensuality (which is sincere) to replace conventionality (which is not), noting, "The layers of acquired knowledge peel away from the mind like a cosmetic and reveal, in patches, the naked flesh beneath, the authentic being hidden there."[122]

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[119] *Ibid.* Pg. 59.
[120] *Ibid.* Pg. 61.
[121] Dickman, Adolphe-Jacques. "André Gide, The Critical Novelist." *The Modern Language Journal.* Vol. 17, No. 7, 1933. Pg. 496.
[122] *The Immoralist.* Pg. 51.

Rather than staying indoors, kept company by his old books about old civilizations, Michel, still recuperating, devotes himself to a physical rather than intellectual existence. He pushes his own limitations through ever longer walks to the pastoral countryside and rushing oases until he at last reaches a pivotal moment of clarity and insight. When Michel dives naked into the flow of a waterfall, he submerges himself in the realm of that which lies below the surface, of land, of course, but also of being. In *Homos* Leo Bersani describes this moment, this turn to the sensual, as Michel's return to the authentic:

> His authentic being – his naked flesh – extends itself into the world, abolishing the space between it and the soil, the grass, and the air. He *is,* briefly, the contact between himself and the world, and he has simultaneously become nothing but a bodily ego *and* has broken down the boundaries of that ego. Outside himself, he has lost himself. The narcissistic expansion of a desiring skin is also the renunciation of narcissistic self-containment.[123]

The 'renunciation of self-containment' is Michel's first act of subversion. He muses, "Actually, and for the first time, it was an awareness of my own worth: what separated me, what distinguished me from the rest was what mattered; what no one but I said or could say – that was what I had to say."[124] The passage corroborates Bersani's analysis in that it shows Michel renouncing morality by becoming self-engrossed. There are obvious traces of Nietzsche in this sentiment: autonomy is seen, as in *The Gay Science*, as a disavowal, a repudiation, of the herd whose shared morality modifies and contains. The authentic self is evidenced in noncompliance, in that which distinguishes, sets apart. This means conformity can never be sincere. Using this logic, it is no wonder sexual deviance and transgression become signals of sincerity.

Let us for a moment return to Gide's friendship with, and arguable apprenticeship to, Oscar Wilde. We know Wilde embodied decadence through his feminine dress, provocative writing, and public, paraded, homosexuality. He was audacious and unapologetic, particularly in his scathing criticisms of the high society to which he veritably belonged. At a time when homosexuality was still deemed a (criminal) act rather than an actual identity, he foregrounded sexual alterity in a way that opened

[123] Bersani, Leo. *Homos.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996. Pg. 120.
[124] *The Immoralist.* Pg. 92.

doors for other explorations of it. Although his life and work clearly inspired Gide, their friendship was not without conflict: "Undoubtedly," Dollimore contends, "Gide was deeply disturbed by Wilde, and not surprisingly since the remarks of Gide in his letters of that time suggest that Wilde was intent on undermining the younger man's self-identity, rooted as it was in a Protestant ethic and high bourgeois moral rigour and repression which generated a kind of conformity which Wilde scorned."[125] Wilde did not want Gide to dissemble, to drift between adherence and renunciation, but to openly live a dissident and thus authentic life.

In Wilde's widely popular and overtly salacious novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* Lord Henry serves as Wilde's mouthpiece: "It is perfectly monstrous," Lord Henry laments, "the way people go about, nowadays, saying things against one behind one's back that are absolutely and entirely true."[126] For Wilde, there is a lack of conviction, even a cowardice, in duplicity. For him, decadence is more than an artistic movement; it is an ideology, a way of existing in the world. Gordon A. Schulz observes that the work shows "a profound truth in hedonism," and that it evinces Wilde's philosophy that "the puritanical denial of sensual desires degrades life."[127] But, it would take Gide, like Michel, time to overcome his upbringing, his conditioning, and to adopt a similar doctrine.

We see Wilde and his consummate nonconformism in Gide's character Ménalque. Though Michel's experiment with freedom mostly takes place on foreign soil, his intermittent returns to France are marked by clandestine conversations with Ménalque, the one person who does not exasperate him with ordinariness. When one of their talks reveals their shared disdain for the duplicitous man of principle, Ménalque quips, "You can't expect any kind of sincerity from him, for he only does what his principles have ordered him to do, or else he considers what he does to be a transgression."[128] A man of principle, governed by a system of heteronormative, reproductive sexuality, is surely insincere; therefore, any transgressions against that said system must be true in and of themselves. For this reason, *The Immoralist* is arguably as much about the friction between sincerity and dissemblance as it is Michel's experiment with freedom. In her comprehensive book,

[125] *Sexual Dissidence.* Pg. 3.
[126] Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray.* Brooklyn: Millennium Publications, 2014. Pg. 112.
[127] "Guilty Man and Tragic Man in Decadent Tales of 'Fin-De-Siècle' Europe." Pg. 7.
[128] *The Immoralist.* Pg. 105-106.

André Gide and the Codes of Homotextuality, Emily Apter comments on Gide's attention here to (actual) truth contra (artistic) sincerity: "*L'Immoraliste* is replete with instruments of literary artifice specifically chosen for their effectiveness in making the text appear sincere."[129] Art convolutes this line between what appears to be and what is sincere. Its truth values are intrinsic to and inseparable from the text and therefore resist discernment through a moralistic lens. This is *l'art pour l'art*.

Roger Pensom acutely observes that it is "quite clear in the conversations with Ménalque," that "we are confronted by the correlation of homosexuality and authenticity"[130]; after all, "the pervert," or homosexual, Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel argues in *Creativity and Perversion,* "has a special disposition to be artistic because of a compulsion to idealize."[131] In relation to masculinism, I would stretch the correlation to include other types of *perversion* to indicate any sexual act or orientation that deviates from conjugal, heteronormativity, including pedophilia (or 'pederasty,' as Gide prefers), adultery, bi- or pan-sexuality. In masculinist literature, the authentic self *is* sexual, and unlimitedly so. That said, masculinism is not *about* sex or sexuality.

Although Michel "must be considered with regard to his slowly developing sexuality," Robert Fagley also finds that "the novel brings to light a wider consideration: the struggle of a man, representative of a collective, to shed the guilt and constraints accumulated since his childhood, reflective of a strictly enforced monolithic morality."[132] This struggle epitomizes the masculinist quest for freedom. Deviant sexuality, however necessary to this quest, is a product, rather than aim, thereof. James T. Day explains that this theme of coming of age, especially through experimentation with sexuality, is a "key structuring device" in which "the youthful protagonist pits his individuality against the pettiness and conformist pressures of an ignoble society."[133] Then *The Immoralist* is not about latent (homo)sexuality, but about a rebellion against cultural conditioning that is fought through sexual dissidence. This is the same rebellion Norman recognizes, and derides, in Sabbath.

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[129] Apter, Emily. *André Gide and the Codes of Homotextuality.* Saratoga: ANMA Libri & Co., 1987. Pg. 116
[130] Pensom, Roger. "Narrative Structure and Authenticity in *L'Immoraliste.*" *The Modern Language Review*. Vol. 84, No. 4, 1989. Pg. 834.
[131] Chasseguet-Smirgel, Janine. *Creativity and Perversion.* London: Free Association, 1985. Pg. 91.
[132] "Narrating (French) Masculinities: Building Male Identity in André Gide's *The Immoralist.*" Pg. 81.
[133] Day, James T. "The Structure of Education in Gide's *L'Immoraliste.*" *Symposium.* 1992. Pg. 23.

The authenticity of masculinist characters like Michel, Humbert and Sabbath is evidenced through rebellious transgression, non-conformism. Theirs, however, is perhaps less a rebellion against an 'ignoble society' than a rebellion for (artistic) freedom, for the reinventing of 'truth' in text. If morality is fixed in notions of right and wrong that are both arbitrary and tentative, then art, whose *decadent* purpose is truth and beauty, must challenge those notions.

The masculinist rebellion for freedom and truth, for *authenticity*, takes place on the body which, according to Freud, remembers the unsublimated self that reason and morality would have it forget. This is why *The Immoralist* is so emblematic of the primary stage of this rebellion. Michel's self-discovery is actualized through his attention to the physical, the sensual, during his convalescence in Biskra. Moral binaries are erased and redrawn to enable his recuperation: "I must consider Good, I must call Right, whatever was healthy for me; must forget, must repulse whatever did not cure."[134] This new attentiveness to his body is what ultimately awakens Michel to the authentic, unsublimated self once stifled by convention. He muses, "After this long agony, I had supposed I would be reborn the same man, and soon connect my present to the past; in the novelty of an unfamiliar country I might thus delude myself; here, no longer. Everything was to teach me what still astonished me: I had changed."[135]

This compulsion to reconnect to the past and to trace a continuous self is the starting point of masculinism. It derives from the felt cage of morality and the awareness that the (sexual) self has been modified and repressed. In this, *The Immoralist* presupposes, and perhaps sets the stage for, Humbert's critique of changing sexual norms and Sabbath's refusal to 'play' by the rules. Transgression is integral to our 'modern' understanding of what it means to be autonomous, to exert free-will, and is consequently fundamental to the masculinist quest for freedom.

The next chapter will further explore transgression, focusing on the extent to which sexual dissidence challenges, and arguably breaks, morality's hold. The (sexual) body will be shown as the locus of the masculinist rebellion and the potential point of access to freedom. We will see the

[134] *The Immoralist.* Pg. 27.
[135] *Ibid.* Pg. 49.

weaponization of Freud's concept of the polymorphous perverse and the (sexual) tactics by which unfreedom is subverted and autonomy realized.

POLYMORPHOUS PERVERSITY AND THE REVOLT OF THE SEXUALLY DEVIANT

This chapter will explore the different manifestations of the polymorphous perverse in *The Immoralist, Lolita,* and *Sabbath's Theater,* first detailing the discourse surrounding the constructedness versus essentialness of gender and sexuality, instances of 'Freudian' perversity including but not limited to homosexuality, and the social implications of perversion and its repression. It will then relate these theories of deviant sexuality to the masculinist correlation between sexual transgression and artistic authenticity evidenced in the three works.

Because transgressive behavior is necessarily deviant, defiant (by definition it violates the laws, precepts or expectations of a given social structure), it evinces nonconformity, even autonomy. Hyper-aware of this, masculinism integrates transgression into its branding, repurposing the idea of deviance as proof of originality. Conformity is then seen as antithetical to truth and art and irreconcilable with truth *in* art. It is denounced as the manifestation of a) instinctual sublimation, b) the abnegation of pleasure and c) the subordination of the individual to the whole. This explains why masculinist literature foregrounds de-sublimation, physical gratification, and the assertion of self. Brian D. Walter states, "In Nabokov's understanding, the genius is distinguished above all by his unwillingness to conform."[136] The same can be said of both Gide and Roth. For them, transgression yields a truth value, a confirmation of authenticity, that need not, and perhaps cannot, adhere to the rules of logic or reality. In masculinist literature, then, artistic truth is often revealed through aestheticism: fantasy, play, and of course pleasure. Because the realm of pleasure is separate from and antagonistic to the governing realm of reality, it is inevitably noncompliant, transgressive. This is why masculinism aligns itself with physical pleasure and repudiates sexual normativity; this is why, at this late hour, it still seems out to create an erotic scandal.

The next several pages will situate masculinism within present-day discourses about gender and sexuality. The point is not to sever the literary texts from the theories used to make sense of them, but to problematize ideas about gender and sexuality as such. After all, as was noted in the previous chapter, there is something farcically scandalous about depictions of physical intimacy, especially in so-called high art. It is curious that something as natural and ubiquitous as sex should continue

[136] Walter, Brian D. "Romantic Parody and the Ironic Muse in *Lolita.*" *Essays in Literature.* Vol. 22, Iss. 1, 1995. Pg. 4.

to excite and incite, to leave us so inexplicably anxious, agitated, enraged. This shared, communal reaction to sex is irrational, even absurd. But it is the 'natural' result of having not yet agreed on the infinitude of sexual possibility, of having not yet moved past the arbitrary morality, not to mention the intrinsic paranoia, that creates and enables sexual normativity: monogamous, procreative heterosexuality. But cultural values shift, evolve; occasionally, they devolve. I would argue that masculinism is at the heart of our coeval transition toward sexual pluralism, so long as this transition is not thwarted by socio-political conservatism. This is of course not to say that masculinism is ready to leave normativity behind, but rather that it identifies itself not as accepting but dissident, rebellious. It relies on (sexual) norms from which to defect; after all, defection, dissidence, capacitates and attests to its authenticity.

Masculinism therefore plants itself in the realm of reality, dissembling, so that it might from there dissent. This is evident in Michel, who marries Marceline to please his father, the embodiment of patriarchal authority, but who then renounces bourgeois morality, his familial obligations, in order to be (sexually, *essentially*) free. Marceline, a character often interpreted as flat and undeveloped, acts as a prop, a moral backdrop, in his story; she is first used to show Michel's conformism, later his resistance. In this, she is created for contrast. Humbert, too, infiltrates the system he intends to, and to some extent does, subvert. We see this in his marriage to Valeria and later courtship of Lolita's mother, Charlotte. But Humbert's ability to infiltrate by way of dissemblance is perhaps most apparent in his performance as Lolita's father. He maintains a public façade (that of a doting dad) that opens doors behind which he can transgress; this allows him to play the part of father and lover, disciplinarian and dissident. Sabbath, too, relies on norms from which to deviate. He acknowledges to Drenka, "I am not by nature, inclination, practice or belief a monogamous being. Period."[137] Yet he is twice married. His marital vows, however, are not meant to be honored but violated. Sabbath's infidelities are not unplanned indiscretions or momentary lapses in judgment; they are that to which he *does* commit. Sabbath is consummately committed to breaking his commitments, to being reliably unreliable. This is his rebellion.

Masculinism as such chooses polymorphous perversity, here: that which deviates from monogamous, procreative heterosexuality, as its means of revolt. The reason for this is twofold.

[137] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 20.

First, morality has its firmest hold on the (sexual) body through the rendering of the aberrant and taboo. This is why sex, as an act, a subject, and as a point of inquiry, is perpetually on the verge of scandal: it is at once natural and flagrant, sanctioned and prohibited. Second, the unsublimated, authentic self is deemed accessible through the body and the body alone. There is a perceived veracity in the visceral, a truth which Western knowledge seeks to convolute, destroy.

To understand masculinism, it is imperative to first understand the 'problem' of sexuality it essentially identifies and exploits. In the hollow name of decency, respectability, Freud's reality principle prescribes procreative monogamy through the institutionalization of (heterosexual) marriage. This reality is crucial to the preservation of civilization in that it creates controls for its own regeneration. But that is not to say that this reality is compulsory, natural or invariable. This reality is not real. And because it is not compulsory, natural or invariable, it is also never certain. For this reason, sex, sexuality and gender are perpetually up for discussion. And there is much at stake in the decipherment of both the (sexually) natural and permissible and the (sexually) taboo and perverse. For masculinism, then, perversion, rooted in the pleasure principle, serves as an obvious vehicle of dissent. It, like masculinism itself, takes aim at the precariousness of morality's own pre- and pro-scripts. Let us, then, take a short detour. Let us look for ourselves at the 'problem' of sexuality.

Sexuality predicated on fantasy, play and pleasure aberrates from the heteronormative, reproductive model prescribed by 'modern' Western morality. In *Three Essays,* Freud argues that "the abandonment of the reproductive function is the common feature of all perversions. We actually describe a sexual activity as perverse if it has given up the aim of reproduction and pursues the attainment of pleasure as an aim independent of it."[138] This abandonment hearkens back to one's infancy, during which, according to Freud, the infant is polymorphously perverse and innately bisexual. Jonathan Dollimore explains that in Freud's estimation such "perversion is ineliminable. It remains manifest in three principle ways: an active practice for some; the repressed constituent of neurosis in others; the unstably sublimated basis of civilization itself."[139] Although

[138] Freud, Sigmund. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality.* Tr. James Strachey. New York: Basic Books, 1972. Pg. 358.
[139] Dollimore, Jonathan. *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991. Pg. 182.

Michel's (homo)sexuality and pedophilia/pederasty is often described as latent or emergent, I would argue that each of the three masculinist protagonists not only practices, but embraces, or even *solicits*, his perversity. Doing so is testament to freedom from repression, from the strictures of morality. Doing so is evidence of authenticity.

The problem of sexuality lies not in the disparity between conformity and dissidence, but in the tenuousness, the unfixedness of sexual normativity itself. What qualifies as natural or perverse, and who has rights to categorize sexuality to begin with? While it is not the purport of this dissertation to endorse constructionist or essentialist views about gender and sexuality or to situate this inquiry in a modernist or postmodernist framework, it would be difficult to speak candidly about the notion of perversion without contextualizing it in the theoretical discourses in which it has been, and continues to be, explored. For this reason, I will provide a brief overview of constructionist and essentialist ideas about gender and sexuality before linking those ideas to what Jonathan Dollimore calls "transgressive reinscription," exemplified through Oscar Wilde, and the "perverse dynamic," demonstrated through André Gide.

It should be noted that conversations about deviant sexuality and perversion often center on male homosexuality. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explains that "a whole cluster of the most crucial sites for the contestation of meaning in twentieth-century culture are…quite indelibly marked with the historical specificity of homosocial/homosexual definition, notably though not exclusively male, from around the turn of the century."[140] The homosocial, so integral to policy-making within the patriarchal power structure, must be distinguished and protected from the homosexual, as the very proximity of the two terms and their connotations carries the potential to subvert the system underwritten by the one, jeopardized by the other. In *The Homosexualization of America,* Dennis Altman elaborates this point, noting that the repression of homosexuality is "essential in the formation of male bonding, itself the basis of psychological authority, and male dominance, in virtually all existing societies."[141] Guy Hocquenghem offers a more provocative formulation, asserting "Every effort to isolate, explain, reduce the contaminated homosexual simply helps place

[140] Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. "Epistemology of the Closet." *Raritan.* 1988. Pg. 43-44.
[141] Altman, Dennis. *The Homosexualization of America.* London: Allen Lane, 1974. Pg. 61.

him at the centre of waking dreams."[142] Michael Kimmel sees this homophobia as particularly striking in American culture. He notes that "men's fear of other men, is the animating condition of the dominant definition of masculinity in America, that the reigning definition of masculinity is a defensive effort to prevent being emasculated."[143] Although the proximity to power seemingly prioritizes male sexuality, female and non-binary perspectives need not, and should not, be excluded from these important, necessary conversations about gender and sexuality.

The 'problem' in discussing non-male sexualities, however, lies in the fact that it has traditionally been viewed as dependent on or secondary to that of men. To address and dismantle this subordinate status, theorists like Monique Wittig have suggested a pluralistic rather than binary approach to gender: "Women belong to men. Thus a lesbian *has* to be something else, a not-woman, a not-man."[144] Although this dissertation will not offer a deeper exploration of female, or non-male, gender and sexuality, it hopes to at least acknowledge the imperativeness of inviting previously marginalized, overlooked or excluded groups, including but certainly not limited to lesbians and transsexual men and women, in *all* conversations about gender and sexuality. The foundational text on gender and sexuality, which this inquiry will invariably allude to, is of course Judith Butler's seminal work, *Gender Trouble.* In that work, Butler calls for a "coalitional feminism," in which both sex and gender are viewed as cultural constructs. She examines the work of feminist philosophers like Luce Irigaray and Simone de Beauvoir to elucidate the ways in which the patriarchal power structure is internalized, most notably through gendered or phallocentric language. In doing so, she is able to expose gender as much a performance as an identity. Gender itself, through this lens, can be seen as an act of dissemblance.[145]

Constructionism has proven popular among cultural and literary theorists, particularly in the last several decades. It maintains that gender is the product of external factors rather than of an innate,

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[142] Hocquenghem, Guy. *Homosexual Desire.* Tr. Daniella Dangoor. London: Allison & Busby, 1978. Pg. 38.
[143] Kimmel, Michael. "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity." *Toward a New Psychology of Gender.* Eds. Mary M. Gergen and Sara N. Davis. New York: Routledge, 1997. Pg. 237.
[144] Wittig, Monique. "The Category of Sex." *Feminist Issues.* Iss. 2, 1982. Pg. 49.
[145] Cf.: Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1990.

and therefore unmalleable, biological predisposition. In other words, gender need not align with the biological sex into which one is born. It is not natural but constructed.

In his analysis of gender in *Shakespeare's Humanism,* Robin Headlam Wells provides a useful synopsis of constructionism, its roots in the Early Modern period, and its current refuge in postmodernism. He explains that "the postmodern belief that gender is the exclusive product of environmental influences […] is an extreme version of what is sometimes called the Standard Social Science Model of human nature."[146] Advocates of this model, he continues, argue that "inherited predispositions count for little; environment and social conditioning are the overriding determinants of our identity."[147] Catherine Belsey, a known constructionist, expands the question of the innateness of gender to include the innateness of identity; she muses that there can "be no specifically [gendered] identity if identity itself does not exist."[148] In *Impersonations,* Stephen Orgel condenses the constructionist standpoint, quipping "Gender is obviously not a fixed category."[149] Karen Newman would agree. In her exploration of fashioning femininity, she comments that "identity, sexual difference and even sexuality itself are constructed rather than 'natural.'"[150] Although the works mentioned here largely employ constructionism to account for various cultural phenomena during the Early Modern period, including crossdressing and transvestitism, they are nonetheless reflective of one side of a very contemporary issue.

Mainstream constructionism, influenced by the work of social psychologists like Michael S. Kimmel[151], Aaron H. Devor[152], and Ruth Pudawer[153], employs specific vocabulary designed to be

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[146] Headlam Wells, Robin. *Shakespeare's Humanism.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Pg. 44.
[147] *Ibid*. Pg. 44.
[148] Belsey, Catherine. "Disrupting Sexual Difference: Meaning and Gender in the Comedies." *Alternative Shakespeares.* Ed. John Drakakis. London: Methuen, 1985. Pg. 188.
[149] Orgel, Stephen. *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Pg. xiv.
[150] Newman, Karen. *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991. Pg. xviii.
[151] Cf. "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity."
[152] Cf. Devor, Aaron H. "Becoming Members of Society: Learning the Social Meanings of Gender." *Rereading America: Cultural Contexts for Critical Thinking and Writing.* Eds. Gary Columbo, Robert Cullen, Bonnie Lisle. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2016.
[153] Cf. Padawer, Ruth. "Sisterhood is Complicated." *Rereading America: Cultural Contexts for Critical Thinking and Writing.* Eds. Gary Columbo, Robert Cullen, Bonnie Lisle. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2016.

both inclusive and unpresumptuous regarding gender and sexuality. For example, *gender identity* is often used to describe one's authentic self, or their own understanding of who they are. *Nonbinary* specifies gender identities that are neither entirely male nor entirely female, while *genderfluid* indicates an unfixed gender identity that varies situationally. There is a plethora of other gender-specific vocabulary either invented or appropriated to give name, and therefore acknowledgment, to diverse ways of being in a gendered, or perhaps even post-gendered, world. Related to, though not synonymous with, these new definitions of gender is of course the concept of sexuality. *Sexual orientation* indicates the gender(s) to which one is attracted, and often gets mixed up in or convoluted with conversations about gender identity; constructionists, it is important to note, do not believe that gender identity is necessarily indicative of sexual preference(s).

On the other side of the issue, we have the essentialist belief that gender, and subsequently sexuality, is biologically designated. This standpoint sees our gendered identities as inseparable from the sexes into which we are born; if we are biologically designated male, we will invariably *continue to be* rather than to become men. Debra Shostak convincingly positions Roth within this theoretical framework, arguing:

> Roth reveals the body as central to the existential question of selfhood. His focus on the body challenges fundamental oppositions that structure our thinking about the self: masculine vs. feminine, human vs. nonhuman, subject vs. object. Roth leads the reader to see that such binary thinking is essentialist in interpreting the body, whose lineaments are normally transparent – or at any rate unquestioned – under the conventional terms of gendered subjectivity.[154]

She connects the logic of essentialism to "the bipolarities of the masculine myth," noting that although indeterminacy could prove an escape from a binary system of gender, Roth continues to adhere to the "bonds of masculinism."[155] He still *seems* convinced of biological determinism. While in this regard essentialism might seem intrinsically conservative, it too has produced

[154] Shostak, Debra. "Roth and Gender". *The Cambridge Companion to Philip Roth.* Ed. Timothy Parrish. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pg. 118.
[155] *Ibid.* Pg. 119.

undoubtedly progressive ideas about gender and sexuality. Robin Headlam Wells, for example, explains how transsexualism can be seen as the manifestation of the innateness rather than constructedness of gender:

> Transsexualism is proof of the power of the prenatally determined gender identity. Neurobiologists now believe that gender is not just a matter of social conditioning or even of chromosomal difference, but also of the hormones to which the foetus is exposed in the uterus. Flood a female feotus with testosterone and its brain will develop male characteristics; deprive a male foetus of testosterone and its hypothalamus will be more like that of a female. Those differences remain an irreversible part of the brain's neuronal architecture and may be the reason why transsexuals feel that they are imprisoned in the wrong body.[156]

Here we see that an essentialist view need not conform to reproductive heteronormativity (although it sometimes does) and can instead be used to account for, or even defend, what Freud has called deviance, abnormality, or perversion. Attributing gender to the brain's neuronal architecture uses science to make sense of the (trans-, homo-, pan-sexual) identities once 'scientifically' disregarded as controllable behaviors rather than (constructed or essential) identities.

As we saw in the previous chapter, ideas about which types of sex acts and sex partners are acceptable vary over time and across locations. In ancient Greece, for example, pederasty was not an uncommon or unfavorable practice, but a method of educating or indoctrinating adolescent boys. Homosexuality, not only in Greece, but in countless other European countries, was long considered a behavior not necessarily linked to one's identity or sense of self. It was often permissible, or at least excusable, because as an act it could be isolated and dealt with, frequently by ignoring it. It was not until it became 'diagnosable' and entangled with modern notions of sexual orientation that homosexuality became an identifying label. As Dollimore notes, "The homosexual [first] *comes into being,* is given an identity, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,"[157] whereas before homosexuality was perhaps "a sinful and evil practice," but not a "congenital abnormality."[158]

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[156] *Shakespeare's Humanism.* Pg. 45.
[157] *Sexual Dissidence.* Pg. 41
[158] *Ibid.* Pg. 46.

This point is perhaps most compellingly and famously iterated in Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality: Volume I, An Introduction.* In his chapter on "Perverse Implantation," Foucault accounts for homosexuality as the embodiment of perversions; he identifies in the 'creation' of the homosexual, for example, a type of person, a history and a biology rather than an act such as sodomy. He contends that "homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the *practice* of sodomy onto a kind of *interior* androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species."[159] He also details how the classification of natures, like homosexual, emerged first in the medical field, and soon after in law, thus producing new realities under new modes of conduct, new ways of addressing this new species.

This perceived innateness of (homo)*sexuality*, related to but separate from perceptions of *gender*, would suggest the naturalness of sexual orientation as such, regardless of whether it adheres to the heteronormative, reproductive model. Here *perversion*, any act that deviates from that model, becomes integrated into one's identity; it becomes who they are rather than what they do. These discussions, then, about the construction contra the innateness of sexuality have invariably changed the way we see each other and ourselves. They have opened the door to new ways of being; for masculinism, this is both intriguing and terrifying. As (sexual) norms and ideas about what it means to be normal evolve, so too must the masculinist rebellion against them. Whereas Michel dissents by flouting patriarchal authority, Sabbath revolts by challenging everyone and everything. For him, in the final decade of the twentieth century, the enemy is everywhere and detached defiance his only means to combat it.

In his exceptional inquiry into sexual dissidence, Dollimore connects Freud's notion of the polymorphous perverse to what he calls the *perverse dynamic*. He uses the term to denote "certain instabilities and contradictions within dominant cultures which exist by virtue of exactly what those structures simultaneously contain and exclude."[160] In this definition, we see traces of both

[159] Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction.* Tr. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1978. Pg. 43.
[160] *Sexual Dissidence.* Pg. 33.

Greenblatt's theory of subversion and containment[161] and Foucault's work on surveillance,[162] in which the patriarchal power structure or the dominant culture intentionally allows but closely monitors certain behaviors and actions while deliberately reacting to and making examples of others. This perverse dynamic:

> transvalues sameness, abandoning self-identity for the unstably proximate; it discloses not an underlying unity in the name of which sexual division can be transcended, but a radical interconnectedness which has been and remains the unstable ground of both repression and liberation.[163]

The proximate is then an insidious other; it is an imminent threat in that it represents a lack of integration into the power structure. In this, it is that which the power structure fails to contain. Dollimore links this essentialist *transgressive ethic* to André Gide, noting:

> While some literary theorists deplore essentialism in all its forms, there is ample evidence of its historically progressive function for subordinate cultures. I argue for the importance of André Gide in this respect, a writer largely eclipsed by recent developments in literary and cultural theory. Gide, in seeking to legitimate and affirm homosexuality, conjoins self-authenticity and sexual dissidence […][164]

This is interesting in that it empowers, or demonstrates as already empowered, the marginalized, whose very authenticity undermines the social system from which they are excluded.

Additionally, Dollimore identifies another type of subversion that can be used to challenge the moral code of the dominant culture: *transgressive reinscription*. Mary Poovey explains that transgressive reinscription can take several forms, "each of which features a member of the subordinate subculture appropriating the cultural prestige traditionally monopolized by members

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[161] Cf. Greenblatt, Stephen. "Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and its Subversion." *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism.* Eds. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985.
[162] Cf. Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* Tr. Alan Sheridan. New York: Random House, Inc., 1977.
[163] *Sexual Dissidence.* Pg. 229.
[164] *Ibid.* Pg. 26.

of the dominant, thereby transforming the concepts themselves."[165] Dollimore illustrates this "tracking-back of the 'other' into the 'same'"[166] through Oscar Wilde and his [Wilde's] *transgressive aesthetic*. After all, Wilde, the flashy decadent of the British aristocracy, threatens to undermine high-nosed morality not as an outsider, but as a member of the governing social structure.

Dollimore's work is especially important here because it allows for a productive discussion about gender and sexuality without limiting it to the essentialist/constructionist debate. Essentialism need not be dismissed as outdated or ultra-conservative, and it need not be replaced by constructionism. Instead, the two seemingly contrary viewpoints can work in conjunction to provide a better understanding of the polymorphous perverse and the function of sexual deviance in subversive works such as *The Immoralist, Lolita,* and *Sabbath's Theater.*

Sexual norms are not in themselves normal, much less natural. They are manifestations of a prescriptive morality whose primary aim is to sublimate the impulses, the *Triebe,* that would otherwise destabilize the influence of the reality principle over the individual. In a society that privileges heteronormative reproductive sexuality, perversion emerges as anything other than or beyond reproductive intercourse. To preserve civilization, perversion becomes taboo and latent desire is either kept hidden or repressed. This subduing of deviant desire results in, or can result in, any number of neuroses.[167] For this reason, the term *perversion* need not carry the negative connotation it has recently acquired. In fact, although Freud understands sublimation as vital to civilization, he sees the stifling of the impulses as unquestionably debilitating for the individual. In an essay on modern nervous illness, he asserts that perverts "would be more healthy if it could have been possible for them to be less good."[168] Dollimore further clarifies that "for Freud we are created sound and commanded to conform in such a way that produces sickness."[169]

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[165] Poovey, Mary. "Exploring Masculinities." *Victorian Studies.* Vol. 36, No. 2, 1993. Pg. 224.
[166] *Sexual Dissidence.* Pg. 33.
[167] Cf. Fenichel, Otto. *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis.* New York: W.W. Norton, 1945.
[168] Freud, Sigmund. "Civilized Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness." Redditch: Read Books, Ltd., 2013. Pg. 17.
[169] *Sexual Dissidence.* Pg. 185.

The taboos placed on non-reproductive sexuality extend to the "too intense bodily pleasure"[170] reminiscent of the infant's world of fantasy and play. Perversion, though divergent from the sexual norms put in place by those in power, is not necessarily anomalistic. In *Life and Death of Psychoanalysis*, Jean Laplanche posits:

> The *exception* – i.e. the perversion – ends up *taking the rule along with it.* The exception, which should presuppose the existence of a definite extinct, a persistent sexual function, with its well-defined norms of sexual accomplishment; that exception ends up undermining and destroying the very notion of a biological norm. The whole of sexuality, or at least the whole of infantile sexuality, ends up by becoming a perversion.[171]

This assessment builds on Freud's famous postulate that one remains rather than becomes a pervert. Because infants are innately bisexual, and arguably autoerotic and/or pansexual, perversion is actually normal, and deviant desire is actually not deviant at all. It is, however, defiant. In "Masochism and Male Subjectivity," Kaja Silverman argues that perversion "subverts many of the binary oppositions upon which the social order rests."[172] In this way, perversion is not so much aberrant as anarchic. It unsettles both reality and morality, calling into question the very founding and enforcement of norms. Marcuse explains, "The perversions […] express rebellion against the subjugation of sexuality under the order of procreation, and against the institutions which guarantee this order."[173] This explains why masculinism integrates perversity in its rebellion. If art is meant to express or somehow articulate truth, it too must challenge (sexual) normativity. It, too, must seek to uncover that which has been repressed, hidden, or repurposed.

Marcuse explains that because morality mobilizes against the "use of the body as a mere object, means, instrument of pleasure," pleasure itself became the "privilege of whores, degenerates, and perverts. Precisely in his gratification, and especially in his sexual gratification, man was to be a higher being, committed to higher values; sexuality was to be dignified by love."[174] In this way,

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[170] Marcuse, Herbert. *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1974. Pg. 39.
[171] Laplanche, Jean. *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis.* Tr. Jeffrey Mehlman. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976. Pg. 23.
[172] Silverman, Kaja. "Masochism and Male Subjectivity." *Camera Obscura.* Vol. 17, 1988. Pg. 33.
[173] *Eros and Civilization.* Pg. 49.
[174] *Eros and Civilization.* Pg. 200-201.

love is used to differentiate human desire; to make the act of intercourse less sensuous and therefore less degenerate and less perverse. In her endeavor to trace the "constraints and resistances of desire in their historical discontinuity,"[175] Catherine Belsey demonstrates the modern agenda of constructing and exalting the notion of true love and situating it within the realm of the reality principle. In this, love is used to justify and buttress sexual normativity and impede sexual deviance; it thus renders perversion not only an act of dissidence but one of lawlessness. Belsey succinctly notes, "Love exists in the sphere of legality and sex outside it."[176] Love is reified in the domestic. It is realized in the monogamous, heterosexual marriages that are made official through legal documentation and that yield the documented progeny who become the future laborers of a sublimated civilization. Love is marketed as an achievable ideal but realized as an institution whose sole function is to discriminate between reproductive heterosexual normativity and polymorphous perversity. True love, then, is inherently, paradoxically resistant to pleasure.

Psychoanalysis, though flawed, becomes a useful tool in exposing the irreconcilableness of the institution of love and the impulsiveness of lust. Belsey asks:

> Can we, for example, talk seriously about desire without taking account of psychoanalysis? It might not be much, but it is probably the only theory we have that focuses on desire without ignoring the signifier. It is not necessary to adopt it uncritically. Freud, for instance, wonderfully isolated the ungendered, polymorphously perverse, infinitely desiring infant that inhabits the unconscious and refuses to grow up, but in other ways Freud carries too much nineteenth-century baggage for us simply to take over some of his 'scientific' categories, not to mention his anti-feminism.[177]

As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, Freud's anti-feminism, evinced in his postulates about penis-envy and the essential maleness of the libido, has been rightfully condemned by feminist psychoanalysts such as Irigaray, Wittig, Butler, and arguably even Belsey, and yet it seems that psychoanalysis offers the theoretical lens most conducive to exploring sexual dissidence.

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[175] Belsey, Catherine. *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994. Pg. 9.
[176] *Ibid.* Pg. 43.
[177] *Ibid.* Pg. 14.

Belsey considers, "But there is also to be found in Freud's texts an understanding of desire as always caught up with prohibition and loss, and the resolution of the Oedipus complex as the reluctant and always incomplete renunciation of forbidden love."[178] While the idea of desire as caught up with or predicated on loss will be further explored in a coming chapter, the thought that desire stems from prohibition is worth mentioning here. It accounts for the fact that neither Michel, Humbert nor Sabbath is satisfied in marriage; because masculinism is inherently averse to convention as such, it naturally allies itself with the forbidden. But owing to this alliance forming in the realm of pleasure, masculinism hones its understanding of prohibition to denote the sexually impermissible. Conventions like marriage are seen as uninspired and (sexually/artistically) stifling. Freud speaks to this inevitable lack of marital fulfillment in his postulate: "Where they love they do not desire, and where they desire they do not love."[179] But we of course must assume that Freud's definition of love is comparable to Belsey's understanding of true love in that it does not necessarily equate a sentiment purer than or superior to lust. We must assume it is the manifestation of sexual normativity, of morality.

Insofar this love is the product of a cultural archetype rooted in the reality principle, in the prevailing morality of the patriarchal power structure, lust forever resides in the realm of pleasure. It is fantastical, whimsical, *true.* It is play (*Spiel*): uncommitted, spontaneous, and impulsive. Therefore, art often reaches back, remembers, what was before sublimation. It calls on the impulses, and looks to deviant desire, to remind itself, and its audiences, what lies beneath the surface of true love.

That is not to say that art need have truth as its primary aim; in fact, it need not have truth as an aim at all. Joel Diggory contends that "Sabbath's disdain for the will to truth is clear in his frequent insistence upon the incomprehensibility of his life and concomitant rejection of rationality and self-knowledge."[180] While this is of course accurate, Diggory's usage of truth differs from that of the Decadents discussed in the previous chapter. For them, truth is found not in rationality, but in

[178] *Ibid.* Pg. 15.
[179] Freud, Sigmund. "On the Universal Tendency to Debasement (Erniedrigung) in the Sphere of Love." Redditch: Read Books, Ltd., 2014. Pg. 9.
[180] Diggory, Joel. "'Tragedy Wrought to its Uttermost': Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater* and the Art of Dying." *Philip Roth Studies.* Vol. 12, No. 2, 2016. Pg. 53.

sensuality. It cannot be deduced; what the body feels, what it desires, is unadulterated by cultural/historical conditioning, and must therefore be true. In "Roth's Doubles," Josh Cohen finds that Roth is able to eradicate any claims to truth through his creation of *doubles*. He draws on Rank's definition of the double as "the detached personification of instincts and desires which were once felt to be unacceptable, but which can be satisfied without responsibility in this direct way"[181] to link the double to Roth's performing protagonists, whose constant self-recreation would render any assertions of (self)truth invalid or at least unreliable. He explains, "The double's doubling is at the same time an annihilation of the self. As the novels attest, however, this is a profoundly generative annihilation; the loss of one's self is infinitely rich in creative possibilities."[182] I would argue, however, that aesthetics would allow for the performing, generative self to be read as authentic; dissemblance is, at least in these works, a truthful or honest act, and, as Cohen notes, the double "personifies Freud's 'return of the repressed'; it confronts the protagonist with impulses which disturb his sense of who he is."[183] The double must then, too, recognize and embrace their (unsublimated) polymorphous perversity; they must embody the *uncanny*, that which is at once strange and familiar.

Roth's novels are, on the one hand, set in the heart of America, often in his hometown of Newark, New Jersey, where national identity and Jewish cultural heritage permeate the thoughts, and especially the recollections, of his hopelessly nostalgic protagonists. As such, their plight seems anomalous, unique to Roth. But their ruminations are at once generally vulgar and pointedly esoteric, universal and singular. It is perhaps for this reason that Mickey Sabbath has been interpreted as both Nietzsche and Falstaff. Diggory sees him and his commitment to performance in Nietzsche's famous assertion: "However much value we may ascribe to truth […] it may be that we need to attribute a higher and more fundamental value to appearance, to the will to illusion."[184] Peter Scheckner describes Sabbath as "a Falstaffian descendent to the court," someone who

[181] Rank, Otto. *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study.* Tr. Harry Tucker, Jr. London: Karnac Books, 1989. Pg. 76.
[182] Cohen, Josh. "Roth's Doubles." *The Cambridge Companion to Philip Roth.* Ed. Timothy Parrish. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pg. 92.
[183] *Ibid.* Pg. 83.
[184] Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future.* New York: Vintage Books, 1989. Pg. 185.

"transgresses with humor all that is sacred."[185] He is a philosopher and a buffoon, a recalcitrant Jew and 'every man.' He is a uniquely American tragic (anti-)hero as well as the visage of a cross-cultural, international masculinist movement.

The morality from which Sabbath futilely tries to escape is reflected in his memories of his hometown and in his reminiscences of his very American, very Jewish, nuclear family. His existence, as both Diggory and Scheckner point out, *is* tragic. In his quest to overcome, to make amends with, insurmountable events that occurred in his hometown and that devastated his family, he realizes his own helplessness and vulnerability. Despite his changing personas and ceaseless performances, Sabbath cannot flee from himself. For each of his roles is infused with an inescapable sense of mourning: for his brother, Morty, who died in the second World War; for his mother, who after years of grieving Morty had 'no life left to take'; and for his capricious and long-missing first wife, Nikki. Unable to reconcile a past marked by loss, Sabbath thus devotes himself to a venturesome life of unreserved, unapologetic eroticism. This abandonment of reality for pleasure is made possible through his relationship with his sexual protégé, Drenka. But their bond is also momentary, fleeting; it too leaves Sabbath exposed and alone. In her absence, Sabbath unravels, self-destructs; he becomes fatuously obscene. Frank Kelleter sees this deliberate turn (or return) to baseness and degeneracy as a kind of surrender or submission. He states, "Recognizing that aesthetic beauty will never be able to hide or sublimate its unsightly roots in physical desire, Sabbath decides to embrace what he calls 'the nasty side of existence' – 'the crazier and uglier the better.'"[186]

Although his story, recounted by an omniscient narrator (presumably though not necessarily or even significantly Roth), begins just after Drenka succumbs to cancer, it is his experiment with the polymorphous perverse, in which Drenka plays a major role, that occupies much of the novel. Yet *Sabbath's Theater* commences not with their 'joint delectation,' but with the ultimatum she gives him in the preliminary stages of her illness:

[185] Scheckner, Peter. "Roth's Falstaff: Transgressive Humor in *Sabbath's Theater.*" *The Midwest Quarterly.* Vol. 46, Iss. 3, 2005. Pg. 3.
[186] Kelleter, Frank. "Portrait of the Sexist as a Dying Man: Death, Ideology, and the Erotic in Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater.*" *Contemporary Literature.* Vol. 39, No. 2, 1998. Pg. 265.

> Either foreswear fucking others or the affair is over. This was the ultimatum, the maddeningly improbably, wholly unforeseen ultimatum, that the mistress of fifty-two delivered in tears to her lover of sixty-four on the anniversary of an attachment that had persisted with an amazing licentiousness – and that, no less amazingly, had stayed their secret – for thirteen years. But now with hormonal infusions ebbing, with the prostate enlarging, with probably no more than another few years of semi-dependable potency still his – with perhaps not that much more life remaining – here at the approach of the end of everything, he was being charged, on pain of losing her, to turn himself inside out.[187]

For Sabbath, it is not that which is taboo that shocks or incites, but that which is not; this is why Drenka's ultimatum stupefies him. It speaks to the morality the two lovers subvert in their shared transgressions, to the constrictive mindset of the salt of the earth Americans by whom they are surrounded. It does not speak to their shared values. The function of her unexpected demand is twofold. First, it evinces the (inter)connectivity Drenka seeks at the threshold of death. She wants to be bound to someone who is bound to her, to someone who will not only remember but continue to desire her when she is gone. Even in death, she wants to be wanted. Second, her ultimatum establishes the contradictory tendencies that Sabbath struggles to integrate: to be free, on the one hand, to be obligated, *enslaved*, to Drenka on the other. This irreconcilable yearning for both detachment and connectivity is demonstrated in Sabbath's response:

> I am confused by you. I can't follow you. What exactly is happening here today? It's not I but you who proposed this ultimatum out of the fucking blue. It's you who presented *me* with the either/or. It's you who is getting rid of *me* overnight…unless, of course, I consent to become overnight a sexual creature of the kind I am not and never have been. Follow me, please. I must become a sexual creature of the kind that you yourself have never dreamed of being. In order to preserve what we have remarkably sustained by pursuing together our sexual desires – are you with me – *my* sexual desires must be deformed, since it is unarguable that, like you – you until today, that is – I am not by nature, inclination, practice, or belief a monogamous being. Period.

[187] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 3.

He first appeals to their once shared polymorphous perversity, to that which had separated them from sexual monogamists, thus highlighting the hypocrisy of her demand. But it is not the malleability of her conviction that most upsets him; it is the fact that her ultimatum would require him too to change, to conform, to become what he is not. It is that it would require his re-sublimation:

> You wish to impose a condition that either deforms me or turns me into an honest man with you. But like all other living creatures I suffer when I am deformed. And it shocks me, I might add, to think that the forthrightness that has sustained and excited us both, that provides such a healthy contrast to the routine deceitfulness that is the hallmark of a hundred million marriages, including yours and mine, is now less to your taste than the solace of conventional lies and repressive puritanism. As a self-imposed challenge, repressive puritanism is fine with me, but it is Titoism, Drenka, *inhuman Titoism*, when it seeks to impose its norms on others by self-righteously suppressing the satanic side of sex.[188]

In his diatribe against puritanism, the very naming of which evokes the ethos of middle America, Sabbath reveals both his decadent connection to truth and his belief in the authenticity of sexual deviance. He differentiates between kinds of sexual creatures, intimating that because his and Drenka's sexuality is unrepressed it must therefore be natural. He contrasts the naturalness of their once shared desires with the 'routine deceitfulness' of sexual conformists, whose willful repression would create the illusion of honesty. Here Sabbath's disdain for the honest man Drenka suddenly wants to make of him, echoes Ménalque's sharp criticism of the man of principle, the moralist whose authentic self is concealed beneath layers of acquired knowledge and bourgeois values.

For Sabbath, sexual forthrightness proves he has not been tricked into posturing; he is, through his unabashed perversity, set off from the defining parameters of the social structure. He is an outlier of a system that prescribes heteronormative reproductive sexuality, monogamy, and loathsome family values. He exists beyond sublimation. Drenka's ultimatum threatens this autonomy but, ironically, in doing so reveals that neither she nor Sabbath is or can be entirely content in their outsider status; their pleasure is co-dependent, symbiotic. Although he claims that monogamy

[188] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 20.

would deform, or even *pervert,* him into what he by 'nature, inclination, practice, or belief' is not, his fantasies, so integral to pleasure, are grounded in Drenka's sexual encounters and his own (active or passive) participation in them. His pleasure is contingent on Drenka's cooperation, her compliance.

Sabbath invariably falls back on Freud's postulate that 'where they love they do not desire and where they desire they do not love,' to try to dissuade Drenka from ending their open relationship. Reminding her of the insipid marriage she escapes through her infidelities, Sabbath questions:

> 'One monogamous mate isn't enough for you?' he asked Drenka. 'You like monogamy so much with him you want it with me too? Is there no connection you can see between your husband's enviable fidelity and the fact that he physically repels you?' Pompously he continued, 'We who have never stopped exciting each other impose on each other no vows, no oaths, no restrictions, whereas with him the fucking is sickening even for the two minutes a month he bends you over the dinner table and does it from behind. And why is that? Matja is big, powerful, virile, a head of black hair like a porcupine. […] Why? The ostentatiously monogamous nature, that is why.'[189]

Sabbath here debunks the cultural myth of masculinism in which, according to Debra Shostak, "the governing ideology of manhood confuses the real body of a man with the idealized body of manliness, masculinity with masculinism, sexual potency with personal power, the fleshy penis with the symbolic phallus as the central signifier of desire at the root of modern selfhood."[190] The myth equates virility, strength and the ability to perform sexually with manliness and patriarchal power. Although Drenka's husband, Matija, possesses the physical traits of manliness, his 'enviable fidelity' prevents him from being an object of desire. Instead, it is perceived freedom, the absence of commitment, that arouses. Monogamy, one of the notable tenets of unfreedom, bars pleasure. Matija is by all means physically manly, especially when compared to stooped, arthritic Sabbath, yet his blind allegiance to the moral system in which he is situated renders him unassertive, impotent, lacking.

[189] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 4.
[190] "Roth and Gender." Pg. 112.

Sabbath, for his part, would not have fought against Drenka's ultimatum as vehemently as he does had he not recognized its implications as potentially fatal. "He was badgering her so relentlessly," the narrator explains, not because he wanted to pursue other sexual partners, but "because he was fighting for his life."[191] The narrator could modify the phrase to more accurately convey that Sabbath was indeed fighting for his *authentic* life, one unaffected by the moral strictures limiting the (sexual) existences of the sublimated monogamists, including Matija.

Sabbath's polymorphous perversity appears in two shifting stages of the narrative: before and after Drenka's death. His story jumps across time and between memories, homing in on moments of perversity that illustrate both Sabbath's erotic insatiability and concomitant fear of and confrontation with his own mortality. In his imprudent lustfulness, we of course see Nietzsche. Sabbath masters the *acte gratuit* in the seemingly unmotivated (usually sexual) acts he performs spontaneously and without fear of repercussion. We also find traces of Nietzsche in his frenetic endeavor to overcome time. In the next chapter, we shall see that it is Nietzsche's notion of 'the great conquerer time' that ultimately thwarts Sabbath and his masculinist compeers in their quest for freedom.

Both the imperviousness of time and the rapacity of the unsublimated instincts are addressed in an exchange between Sabbath and his friend Norman's wife. When Sabbath visits his longtime associate to attend a mutual acquaintance's funeral, he wastes no time in baiting Norman's wife, Michelle. Sabbath can tell from Michelle's laugh "if not from the fact that he was being permitted to play footsie with her"[192] that hers is not a good marriage. He immediately identifies her marital predicament, her (sexual) ennui, as a consequence of aging: "Dusk is descending, and sex, our greatest luxury, is racing away at a tremendous speed, *everything* is racing off at a tremendous speed and you wonder at your folly in having ever turned down a single squalid fuck."[193] In Sabbath, Michelle recognizes a freedom from morality made apparent in his 'primal emotions' and 'indecent language.' This overt noncompliance coupled with Sabbath's striking, if salacious,

[191] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 27.
[192] *Ibid.* Pg. 305.
[193] *Ibid.* Pg. 306.

elocution clearly intrigues her. They engage in late-night, clandestine flirtations, in which his willingness is contrasted with her reservation: "'Unbridled excess knows no limit in you,' she said, 'but I suffer from a severe predilection not to ruin my life.'"[194] She nevertheless gives in to the advances of the senescent puppeteer, offering to meet in the coming days. Confounded by her own impulsiveness, Michelle asks how they arrived at this, the start of an affair, so soon, to which Sabbath judiciously answers, "'It's a consequence of living a long time. There isn't forever to fuck around.'"[195]

Michelle's planned indiscretion, which incidentally never reaches fruition, seems to be about escaping the monotony of a lust-less marriage; the narrator notes, "Hers was the ordinary automatic dishonesty. She was a betrayer with a small-*b*, and small-*b* betrayals are happening all the time – by now Sabbath could pull them off in his sleep."[196] Sabbath's incessant 'big-*b* betrayals,' on the other hand, stem from a will to recklessness, a revolt against morality. Although he seems momentarily enamored, it appears far more likely that it is the game of infatuation, the *Spiel*, that propels him in his rebellion:

> Seeing Michelle so enthrallingly kimono'd, his *schmutzig* clothes balled up under her arm – and with her geisha boy haircut lending just the right touch of transsexual tawdriness to the whole slatternly picture – he knew he could kill for her. Kill Norman. Push him out the fucking window. All that marmalade, mine.

Even as he inwardly declares he could kill for Michelle, and even as he commits to a secret tryst with her, Sabbath remains solely devoted to his own irresolution. Michelle, though attractive and intelligent, naturally fails to keep Sabbath's attention. By the time she leaves the room, his thoughts are already elsewhere: on imaginary lovers, including Norman and Michelle's college-aged daughter, and on lost paramours: Nikki and of course Drenka. It is not surprising that Sabbath soon overstays his welcome in Norman's home. But he is not outed for seducing Michelle, to which he readily, even exuberantly, admits, but for committing an arguably lesser indiscretion. Norman chastises Sabbath:

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[194] *Ibid.* Pg. 333.
[195] *Ibid.* Pg. 335.
[196] *Ibid.* Pg. 340-341.

> We all know how you are a man on the superhuman scale, who has no fear of verbal exaggeration, but not everything is worth saying, even to a successful person like me. Don't. Not necessary. My wife found our daughter's underpants in your pocket. What do you expect her to do? How do you expect her to respond? Don't degrade yourself further by defiling my wife.[197]

Sabbath counters Norman with the simple if unconvincing declarations, "I wasn't degrading myself. I wasn't defiling your wife." He then posits the rhetorical question, "Norman, aren't the stakes too high for us to bow to convention?"[198] He is neither ashamed nor apologetic; instead, he is spiteful. He teases the friend he ought to be placating, musing aloud that Michelle has surely contemplated strangling her husband, that she has surely wanted freedom from him. It is unlikely that he is off. His is a cruel honesty, and Sabbath does not mean to help his own cause. He relishes his own provocations and the anguish they cause Norman. His attack on Norman and the wife and children he tritely 'loves more than anything else in this world' is as gratifying as bedding Michelle would have been. Sabbath is not defeated; he is having fun. This is why Frank Kelleter argues that "shame and its lack are the main themes […] of *Sabbath's Theater.*"[199]

This boyish, and often rascally, innocence with which he immodestly approaches and often botches sexual opportunities is indicative of his rejection of reality and all its interdictions. It is of course also suggestive of his allegiance to play and the polymorphously perverse. But Sabbath's is not the only perversity detailed in the narrative; acts of sexual deviance by countless, if not all, characters punctuate the novel, revealing the naturalness of ostensibly unnatural desires and impulses. Before devising the ultimatum doubtless linked to her illness, Drenka, under Sabbath's tutelage, engages in numerous dalliances with numerous men and at least a few women.

Drenka, whom Frank Kelleter rightfully describes as Sabbath's "sexual alter-ego,"[200] achieves her libidinal liberation through Sabbath. In what Claudia Roth Pierpont describes as Roth's "most heartfelt love story," Drenka makes an unlikely heroine. She is a character who, Pierpont notes,

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[197] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 343.
[198] *Ibid.* Pg. 343.
[199] "Portrait of the Sexist as a Dying Man." Pg. 264.
[200] "Portrait of the Sexist as a Dying Man." Pg. 280.

"is over fifty and (slightly) overweight but who, more important, is both sexually rapacious and spiritually pure, traits that Roth manages to make seem naturally allied."[201] Hers, as already suggested in her unlikely ultimatum, is a story of contradictions. She is simultaneously the product of a traditional Croatian family with deep-seated notions about one's obligation to both kin and country, but also of her own adventurousness, which reaches its climax under Sabbath's meticulous direction.

Although Drenka is not attractive in the conventional way Michelle is, she does possess an "intangible aura of invitation." The "shortish, less than startling-looking middle-aged woman corseted by all her smiling courtesy"[202] is, after all, propelled by an eroticism that demands attention. Even before Sabbath, in the 'pre-AIDS time,' Drenka flouts convention to engage in random, no strings attached intercourse. She explains to Sabbath that her hook-ups began with an Italian train conductor, before she was married or in any other theoretically committed relationship. "'This is when I worked a year in Zagreb,'" she discloses:

> I guess he would come in the train car, a little, good-looking Italian guy who speaks Italian, and you know, they're sexy, and maybe my friends, we're having a party or something like that – I can't remember who initiates what. No, I did it. I sold him cigarettes. […] That's how it started. […] When I was working in Zagreb that year after high school, I loved to be fucked.[203]

It is clear that although Sabbath helps her to reconnect to her sexuality, Drenka was never fully sublimated. Despite the conventions that would compel her , through shame or appeals to decency or even religion, to suppress her libidinal urges, she, like Sabbath, audaciously, *playfully*, surrenders to the adventure of promiscuity. Not insignificantly, Drenka begins to teeter between pleasure, rooted in fantasy and play, and reality at a liminal stage of her adolescence. She is on the verge of becoming when she meets the Italian; she has ceased to be a child but has not yet become a woman when she evolves as (and again into) a sexual being. It is in this liminal stage that she masters dissemblance or the art of *appearing to be*.

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[201] Pierpont, Claudia Roth. "The Great Enemy of Books." *The New Yorker.* May 1, 2006. Pg. 83.
[202] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 9
[203] *Ibid.* Pg. 77.

On the surface, Drenka seems to have carried her traditional eastern European values with her to Madamaska Falls; she is a wife, and soon after a mother. She is the affable waitress in the restaurant of their family-owned inn, cheerfully serving the Croatian dishes her husband prepares for their guests. Her life is normal, nondescript, and marked by an admirable work ethic and devotion to the care of others. She and Matija are esteemed pillars of their small American community, even though the earnestness of their industry isolates them from their employees. In an impromptu conversation between Sabbath, disguised as an impartial guest, and Matija, the latter reveals:

> 'It is not always nice for us that our staff doesn't like us. I think some of our staff likes us a lot. A lot of them don't care for us at all. In some places the bar is open to the staff after hours. We don't have that kind of thing here. Those are the kinds of places that go bankrupt and where the staff is in terrible auto accidents on the way home. Not here. Here it is not party time with the owners. Here is it not fun. My wife and I are not fun at all. We are work. We are a business. All Yugoslavs when they go abroad, they are very hardworking. Something in our history pushes them for survival. Thank you.'[204]

Matija's comments are revealing for a number of reasons. They indicate his whole-hearted adherence to the reality principle; in an obvious repudiation of play, fun, and, it can be inferred, (sexual) pleasure, he acts as an instrument of labor, willingly sacrificing his physical body to the rigors of work. In a similar vein, his comments show pride in the earnestness of what he surely considers his higher values. He is concomitantly superior to and responsible for the frivolous, *pleasure-seeking* employees beneath him. Matija, unlike Sabbath, adheres to the patriarchal power structure in which his business and his work both perform a laudable function. In doing so, he enables the survival of both his family and 'herd'; he is self-righteous in his sense of self-sacrifice. Perhaps most interesting (because undiscerning) in his comments, however, is that he groups his wife with himself, pulling her into the moral orbit he alone occupies. It is an act of both obliviousness and ownership; he sees her identity as a mere extension of his own. This is of course a testament to his anachronous ideas about gender and manhood, but also to Drenka's proclivity to perform and deceive.

[204] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 44.

In his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Philip Roth*, Timothy Parrish describes Roth as "the flamboyant performer whose ideal artist impersonates someone impersonating, [who] has always been attracted to characters that challenge the aura of a legitimately stern moralist."[205] We of course see this in Roth's juxtaposition of Drenka and Matija – the clandestine dissenter on the one hand, the resolute conformist on the other. The challenge to Matija comes in Drenka's deception. She impersonates by pretending to be a submissive wife and mother, but also revels in her performances with Sabbath: as his prostitute, as her husband's naughty niece, and, ultimately, as Sabbath's soulmate. She is one of Roth's 'human animals,' whom Cohen concisely describes as "above all deceiving and deceived,"[206] a character whose identity is not fixed, but ever-changing.

Because Roth's oeuvre often focuses on what Debra Shostak rightly identifies as raw, male desires, he has frequently faced criticism for his work. She explains:

> His attention to the insatiable, transgressive, and often stultified appetites of men has laid him open to charges of misogyny, especially in his early work. […] Indeed, Roth's male characters project their fears upon women who seem to threaten their performance of masculinity. Where a female character in Roth's early work appears flattest, she is presented almost exclusively through the male character's point of view, if not literally in a first-person voice, then as mediated through the focalized consciousness of the male protagonist That point of view moves the female characters toward objectification when Roth's men express their anxieties, even hysteria, in measuring themselves against the myth of masculinity.[207]

While Shostak accurately places the 'flatter' treatment of female characters within some of Roth's earlier work, it is important to note that the accusations of misogyny have continued throughout his literary career, and that *Sabbath's Theater* has been one of the most targeted of his novels. This is of course because of Sabbath's deplorability, but also because of Drenka's representation.

[205] Parrish, Timothy. "Introduction: Roth at mid-career." *The Cambridge Companion to Philip Roth.* Ed. Timothy Parrish. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pg. 6.
[206] "Roth's Doubles." Pg. 82.
[207] "Roth and Gender." Pg. 112.

Drenka presents an interesting case in this regard. She is at once multidimensional, 'fleshed out,' and disproportionately sexual. While she certainly represents one of Roth's fuller characters, she seems, in Freud's problematic conceptualization, to be charged with an overtly masculine energy. She is a female protagonist who "men began to understand […] was powered with a carnality much like their own."[208] It is tempting to read Drenka through the Freudian fallacy of the masculine libido, to interpret her not as a fully rounded female character, but as another of Roth's alter-egos or Sabbath's double. This temptation arguably stems from the internalization of Freud's postulate that the libido or sexual drive is indubitably masculine, so sexual confidence, and certainly sexual assertion, must then also be masculine.

In "The Freudian Mystique: Freud, Women, and Feminism," Samuel Slipp asks, "How could Freud, one of the great geniuses of the modern age, be so wrong about women? […] Why did Freud consider the libido to be a masculine force in both genders?"[209] Others, including Karl Abraham, Ernest Jones, Helene Deutsch, and Karen Horney, have also denounced Freud's inattention to, or disavowal of, female sexuality. Luce Irigaray, for her part, tries to "recover the place of *her* [my italics] exploitation by discourse,"[210] in her mimetic approach to historically (though not necessarily) feminine language. Simone de Beauvoir condemns Freud's incomprehension of women's otherness in her seminal work *The Second Sex,* an entire chapter of which, "The Psychoanalytic Point of View," she dedicates to his (deficient) theory of sexual monism. She argues for the recognition of a feminine libido with "its own original nature."[211] Whereas Freud imagines little girls as little men, and therefore without sexual particularity, Beauvoir sees female sexuality as both innate and innately other. This sexuality, it is imperative to mention, is different from Freud's understanding of *femininity*, which he equates with a lack of independence and agency.

The problem, however, in trying to differentiate between feminine and masculine libidos, in trying to draw a distinct line down a vaguely, though not necessarily incorrectly, imagined border,

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[208] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 9.
[209] Slipp, Samuel. *The Freudian Mystique: Freud, Women and Feminism*. New York: New York University Press, 1993. Pg. 1.
[210] Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which is Not One.* Tr. Catherine Porter. Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1985. Pg. 76.
[211] Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex.* Tr. H.M. Parshley. New York: Vintage Books, 1989. Pg. 39.

correlates to our earlier discussion on the essentialness versus the construction of gender and sexuality. Are gender and sexuality necessarily designated? Though hardly imperative to answer this question directly, it is surely worth at least considering when interpreting Drenka's prominently sexual identity. Is she a 'masculine woman' or merely a woman confident not only in her morally condoned heteronormative, procreative sexuality, but also in her bisexual, polymorphous perversity? This question leads, too, to an equally important, equally problematic inquiry about who has the right to ask such questions and to tell such stories. Is it *permissible* for a male writer like Philip Roth to act as the purveyor of female sexuality through literary characters like Drenka, especially when their salaciousness seems to speak to a specifically male desire? These questions, though not necessarily pertinent to this exploration, presuppose the current backlash against masculinism and should therefore be kept in the back of our minds, especially in our analyses of polymorphously perverse female characters.

Drenka, perhaps more than Roth, Gide or Nabokov's other characters, embodies Freud's theories of the polymorphous perverse. We have already seen that she dissembles in order to appear to conform to the sexual norms of her given social structure, whether in Eastern Europe or the heartland of America, and that she adroitly, furtively, flouts convention in her pursuit of pleasure. What we have not yet looked at, though, is Drenka's bisexuality.

Freud maintains that infants are innately, invariably, bisexual; that they find objects of desire in both primary caregivers and themselves. He argues that while many eventually outgrow (or suppress) this perversity, others retain it. This notion of infant sexuality universalizes the experience of trauma and attests to the pervasion of rather than opposition to normal sexual development on the part of the neuroses. Though some have felt this universalization of trauma a way of trivializing actual trauma, i.e. sexual violence experienced in childhood, the notion is fundamental to psychoanalysis which deems trauma rooted in and inseparable from the unconscious.

For Drenka, it is Sabbath who (re)introduces her to the bisexual side of herself. He, the symbolic phallus, is the ringleader of her first homosexual encounter. But, although he is the one who arranges the series of ménage à trois with the German hitchhiker, Christa, his presence is not

necessary to Drenka's pleasure. She of course tells Sabbath that it is, assuring him, and perhaps trying to convince herself, that she needs at least the proximity of a man to climax even when engaging in intercourse with a woman. Yet she not only returns to Christa without Sabbath, but she also sleeps with another woman, a prostitute, in the company of a different lover. Although her initial actions with other women seem to be for the benefit of her male companions, Drenka clearly, if somewhat abashedly, enjoys homosexual coitus.

In this, Roth would appear progressive in his views on sexuality. Yet his acceptance, or at least detailing, of homosexuality is limited to female intercourse. While Sabbath's near homosexual encounter with his bookish shipmate on the so-called 'Romance Run' is given a line's attention (which in fact underscores the taboo of male homosexuality in contrast to the fetishization of female homosexuality), the perpetual return to lesbian relationships in *Sabbath's Theater* speaks to a fascination with, but also tentativeness about, homosexuality in general.

In an unlikely turn of events, and a crucial moment of the narrative, Sabbath's wife, Roseanna, ultimately pairs with Christa, Sabbath and Drenka's former lover. At the end of the novel, when Sabbath has retreated home, he is surprised to find an unknown vehicle parked next to his wife's car. In a final act of voyeurism, he creeps along the side of the house and peers through his bedroom window. He first sees his wife cuddled up in bed with Christa, watching a nature documentary on gorillas. The two then proceed to 'act out' the animals, a performance that culminates in intercourse:

> Under his eyes, Christa and Rosie developed complete gorilla personalities – the two of them living in the gorilla dimension, embodying the height of gorilla soulfulness, enacting the highest act of gorilla rationality and love. The whole world was the other one. The great importance of the other body. Their unity: giver the taker, taker the giver, Christa perfectly confident in Rosie's hands grazing her, a map on which Rosie's hands trace a journey of sensual tact. And between them that liquid, intensely wordless gorilla look, the only noises rising from the bed Christa's chicken-like baby-gorilla clucks of comfort and contentment. Roseanna Gorilla. I am nature's tool. I am the fulfiller of every need. If only the two of *them,* husband and wife, had pretended to be gorillas, nothing but gorillas all the

> time! Instead they had pretended, only too well, to be being human beings.[212]

Again, sexual relations are marked, even skewed, by the shroud of deception, by the performance of *pretending to be.* This hearkens back to Josh Cohen's remark that, for Roth, 'the human animal is above all deceiving and deceived.' But the backdrop of the animal documentary and the subsequent play of Roseanna and Christa serve an interesting purpose beyond contrasting human deception with animal directness; they serve as an indicator, a reminder, that if the human animal deceives, it is because its unsublimated sexuality, unlike that of its primate counterpart, has been tabooed. Frank Kelleter explains that in depictions of animal copulation, "Even the most violent coitus is free from obscenity (and can accordingly be shown on television) as long as it remains indifferent to its own significance. It takes the insertion of a human body to turn animal sexuality into a noteworthy perversion."[213] The presumed naturalness of animal copulation in made clear in the permissibility of the human observation of it; it is not potentially pornographic in the way human sex is. This is because the naturalness of human sex is obfuscated by the morality proscribing pleasure. It is the human predicament to have to pretend 'to be being' something other than and superior to the impulsive, amoral animal it arguably is or would be if unsublimated.

The scene with Roseanna and Christa mimics the documentary playing in the background. They become the animal subjects of observation, Sabbath the human onlooker. Their interaction evinces the naturalness of perverse sex by showing them in their natural habitat, in not only a home, but a bedroom tucked away from public view. The irony, of course, is that Sabbath bears witness to what ought to be private, concealed. The home, though here indicative of a space free from reprobation, also represents a space closed off, shut in. Insofar as it is a safe haven, a refuge, it is also a cage.

Their cage is of course reminiscent of the one, ironically housing a gorilla, that inspires Nabokov's tale of illicit love. Humbert recalls of his early stages of tortured self-restraint and self-negation, "In my twenties and early thirties, I did not understand my throes quite so clearly. While my body knew what it craved for, my mind rejected my body's every plea. One moment I was ashamed and

[212] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 438.
[213] "Portrait of the Sexist as a Dying Man." Pg. 270.

frightened, another recklessly optimistic. Taboos strangulated me."[214] These taboos on perversions are what initially keep his desire in check; they encourage him to marry Valeria and play the part of both a good husband and citizen. He muses:

> It occurred to me that regular hours, home-cooked meals, all the conventions of marriage, the prophylactic routine of its bedroom activities and, who knows, the eventual flowering of certain moral values, of certain spiritual substitutes, might help me, if not to purge myself of my degrading and dangerous desires, at least to keep them under pacific control.[215]

Although Humbert sees his short-lived marriage as an almost heroic effort to stifle his deviant desire and settle into a routine, sublimated existence, he also admits that "what really attracted me to Valeria was the imitation she gave of a little girl."[216] Acutely aware of the taboos placed on, and possible punishments in response to, pedophilia, he puts on a show of normalcy. The taboos on his desire form the bars of morality's cage that keep his desire contained, thwarted, repressed.

Nabokov, like Roth, instigates and agitates through his protagonist's wayward sexuality, through the metaphorical bending of the cage. In "Memory, Consciousness and Time in Nabokov's *Lolita,*" Olga Hasty points out that it is the "circumscription of consciousness" that "lies at the heart of *Lolita,* where we see the drawing of the confining bars (indeed, the very construction of the cage) and yet also the means by which awareness might be extended beyond them."[217] It is this notion, this hope, of getting past that which confines that fuels these masculinist texts. And, like Roth, Nabokov further pushes the boundaries of convention by pairing his wayward protagonist with an equally wayward accomplice. But, Drenka, unlike young Dolores Haze, is *of age*, capable of being complicit and implicated in her lover's misdeeds. She is neither vulnerable nor exploited. Nabokov's Lolita is of course different. She is young, *so* young. But does youth necessarily equate innocence?

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[214] *Lolita.* Pg. 19.
[215] *Lolita.* Pg. 26.
[216] *Ibid.* Pg. 26-27.
[217] Hasty, Olga. "Time, Memory and Consciousness in Nabokov's *Lolita." Kronoscope.* Iss. 4, Vol. 2, 2004.

Freud insists that children are (bi)sexual beings and that they, unlike their adult counterparts, are not yet fully sublimated under the reality principle. They are often sexually inquisitive, unreserved, and reckless. The showing and telling and kissing and touching belong to their realm of play, the realm of both imagination and discovery. And here is where things get complicated…

In the previous chapter, we looked at sexual dissidence as a means to push moral boundaries and uncover authenticity. We explored artistic license, and acknowledged *The Immoralist, Lolita* and *Sabbath's Theater* as works blatantly provocative, but also rhetorically sophisticated. We saw how their sophistication is used to win over audiences whose morality would otherwise prevent them from sympathizing with, let alone accepting, transgressive desire. This inquiry is certainly not meant to be an exoneration of *actual* acts that could be deemed exploitative or abusive, but is instead intended as a purely literary exploration. So, when Humbert confides, "I am going to tell you something very strange: it was she who seduced me,"[218] this inquiry will focus on the literary and philosophical implications of that assertion. It will not touch on whether such an assertion is, or could ever, be valid. After all, the truth values in art are very different from those in reality.

After the unforeseen death of Lolita's mother, Charlotte, Humbert picks Lolita up from Camp Q and they embark on their journey, careening between the realms of fantasy and reality. To delay Lolita's mourning, not to mention the thwarting of pleasure her melancholy might cause, Humbert does not reveal that her mother has died. Instead, he credits an unknown, indescribable illness for Charlotte's absence. Through his trademark play on words, Humbert lessens the severity of his deception while concomitantly disparaging Lolita as coolly self-centered and unconcerned about her mother's condition:

> I said the doctors did not quite know yet what the trouble was. Anyway, something abdominal. Abominable? No, abdominal. We would have to hang around for a while. The hospital was in the country, near the gay town of Lepingville, where a great poet had resided in the early nineteenth century and where we would take in all the shows. She thought it a peachy idea and wondered if we could make Lepingville before nine P.M.[219]

[218] *Lolita.* Pg. 140.
[219] *Ibid.* Pg. 118.

He wants us to believe her an impudent child, which perhaps she is. He also wants us to believe her a 'cynical nymphet,' a 'species' marked by cunning, licentiousness, and lack of refinement; a creature at play whose play, however, is tinged with a malice that would negate any claims to innocence. In Humbert's account, Lolita possesses the astuteness, the carnal knowledge, that he himself lacks. She is the seductress and he her innocent victim. His inculpability is proven in "how dreadfully stupid poor Humbert always was in matters of sex" and the attestation that he "was as naïve as only a pervert can be."[220]

When Lolita cryptically blurts out, "'I've been revoltingly unfaithful to you, but it doesn't matter one bit, because you've stopped caring for me anyway,'"[221] she hints at both her attraction to Humbert as well as the sexual experiences she has accrued at camp. Additionally, she presumes that she had before been in a committed, sexual relationship with Humbert…or at least she pretends to presume. She flirts not only with him, but also with the idea of her own sexuality and the power it has over him. For this reason, James Twitchell has designated *Lolita* as "one of the few American female Bildungsromans of the twentieth-century,"[222] an accolade Brian D. Walter attributes to "its honest treatment of a girl's maturation" and its "rejection of extremes – whore or nun."[223] This rejection of extremes would of course blur the lines separating reality from fantasy, conformity and perversion. It would also render the concept of innocence in itself fallible, for how, when one is innately both good and bad, whore *and* nun, could they ever be considered truly faultless?

Lolita answers Humbert's inquiry, "'Why do you think I have ceased caring for you, Lo?'" with the telling response, "'Well, you haven't kissed me yet, have you?'"[224] But, for Lolita, unlike for Humbert, sex is still a game; it is something someone ultimately wins at. It is all daring: *How far am I willing to go? Am I braver than my opponent?* So, in Humbert's telling of what happens next, we bear witness to two unfolding realities. Though both stem from a place of fantasy, they have very different implications. For Humbert, the game is like chess; it requires premeditation,

[220] *Ibid.* Pg. 26-27.
[221] *Ibid.* Pg. 119.
[222] Twitchell, James. "*Lolita* as Bildungsroman." *Genre* 7.3, 1974. Pg. 277.
[223] Walter, Brian D. "Romantic parody and the Ironic Muse in *Lolita.*" Pg. 13.
[224] *Lolita.* Pg. 119.

calculation, and patience. In *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov offers his own literary interpretation of the game, noting:

> It should be understood that competition in chess problems is not really between White and Black but between the composer and the hypothetical solver (just as in first-rate work of fiction the real clash is not between the characters, but between the author and the world), so that a great part of a problem's value is due to the number of 'tries' – delusive opening moves, false scents, spacious lines of play, astutely and lovingly prepared to lead the would-be solver astray.[225]

Humbert's game of course follows Nabokov's strategy; it requires artifice and deception, dissemblance and trickery. But above all it requires inaction . You see, for Humbert, the fun is not to be had in beating or out maneuvering an opponent, as it is for Lolita; in fact, Humbert's game can hardly be called fun at all. For Humbert, winning is a matter of self-domination, of prevailing over himself and the urges that might otherwise give him and his strategy away. Therefore, his objective is to tread lightly, feigning to be unversed in the rules, the limitations and loopholes, of his own game:

> Hardly had the car come to a standstill than Lolita positively flowed into my arms. Not daring, not daring let myself go – not even daring let myself realize that *this* (sweet wetness and trembling fire) was the beginning of the ineffable life which, ably assisted by fate, I had finally willed into being – not daring really kiss her, I touched her hot, opening lips with the utmost piety, tiny sips, nothing salacious; […].[226]

Humbert's success depends on his ability to wait and withhold. If he wins, he wins Lolita. But for Lolita, who plays in real-time and whose moves are both spontaneous and willfully provocative, Humbert is but a game piece. Can she win by convincing him, and ultimately herself, of the extent to which she is willing to go? Can she, a girl, win by playing, by performing, as a woman? For Lolita, the game is one of audacity rather than strategy:

[225] Nabokov, Vladimir. *Speak, Memory.* Pg. 290.
[226] *Lolita.* Pg. 119.

> […] but she, with an impatient wriggle, pressed her mouth to mine so hard that I felt her big front teeth and shared in the peppermint taste of her saliva. I knew, of course, it was but an innocent game on her part, a bit of a backfisch foolery in imitation of some simulacrum of fake romance, and since (as the psychotherapist, as well as the rapist, will tell you) the limits and rules of such girlish games are fluid, or at least too childishly subtle for the senior partner to grasp – I was dreadfully afraid I might go too far and cause her to start back in revulsion and terror. And, as above all I was agonizingly anxious to smuggle her into the hermetic seclusion of The Enchanted Hunters, and we had still eighty miles to go, blessed intuition broke our embrace […][227]

Humbert handles this new life he 'willed into being' with practiced restraint. Contrary to Lolita, he does not dare let himself go; he is measured, pious. A chaste man tempted by his muse, his amusement, he only 'sips' from her kiss, as a priest would (with comparable irony) his chalice. It is Lolita who is impetuous, going 'all in' with teeth and tongue, peppermint-flavored saliva. Hers is a child's ebullience, a child's daring. But she does not yet see how much is at stake; for all her nymphish cunning, she lacks adult foresight. She does not see she is playing a game she has already lost.

Humbert, the amateur psychoanalyst and nascent rapist, realizes he must proceed with caution in Lolita's realm of play. Her rules are not fixed as his are; her limitations, *How far is she willing to go?,* contract and expand, so he must be careful not to push against them. He must not cause her to start back or pull away. This too is part of his game. He moves his pieces so slowly, with such deliberation, that Lolita, both distracted and delighted by her own insolence, fails to perceive him gaining ground.

Part of the allure of *Lolita* is the abstruseness of the characters and their motivations. Because so much of the storytelling is embedded in imagination and play, and because both Humbert and Lolita are presented as innocent at times, complicit at others, they are impossible to pin down, to read, in any straight-forward way. They are complicated and moody, exuberant and anxiety-ridden; they are in some ways typical and in others anomalous. Perhaps this is especially true of Lolita,

[227] *Ibid.* Pg. 119-120.

with whom, as an unruly, self-absorbed adolescent, it is at times difficult to condole. Even when we ought to unquestionably be on her side, she is, after all, the victim of terrible abuse, we can never completely sympathize. We are always ambivalent about Humbert and Lolita, never sure in whose corner we stand. This ambivalence leads, or should lead, us to question the parameters, or malleability, of our own morality, our own sense of right and wrong. In this, the novel *is* didactic and *does* have a moral in tow. In this, the moral is that morals are not to be trusted.

Humbert again keeps us on the fence about Lolita, the impudent American, by (re)positioning himself throughout the narrative. He is a self-proclaimed pervert and genius, but he is also, among other things, a 'fake' authority on childhood development. These changing personas with their changing vantage points are also strategic, for he uses them to introduce new players into his game. Though he divulges his own deceit, he does so in a language and with an expertise that suggests we, his readers and now opponents, may be being deceived by his (admitted) deception:

> Despite my having dabbled in psychiatry and social work, I really knew very little about children. After all, Lolita was only twelve, and no matter what concessions I made to time and place – even bearing in mind the cruel behavior of American schoolchildren – I still was under the impression that whatever went wrong among those brash brats, went on at a later age, and in a different environment. Therefore (to retrieve the thread of this explanation) the moralist in me by-passed the issue by clinging to conventional notions of what twelve-year old girls should be. The child therapist in me (a fake, as most of them are – but no matter) regurgitated neo-Freudian hash and conjured up a dreaming and exaggerating Dolly in the 'latency' period of girlhood.[228]

We know Humbert lacks credibility as a psychiatrist, social worker and child therapist. We know he is not what he says he is, that he, like Sabbath, is assuming roles, playing parts. His identity is therefore unfixed and impossible to designate, his self-proclamations not to be believed. So, how do we, the passive players in this game not of seduction, but for absolution, determine the extent of Humbert's goodness or Lolita's badness? And why is our estimation of the story's namesake and her (anti-)hero so important?

[228] *Lolita.* Pg. 131-132.

We have now been conditioned to doubt Humbert; ironically, it is this incertitude that is so crucial to his absolution. For he has no intention of getting us off the fence about Lolita or solidifying our perceptions of him. Instead of trying to convince us of his benevolence, he attests to his own multifariousness, this time through self-vilification: "Finally, the sensualist in me (a great and insane monster) had no objection to some depravity in his prey."[229] But we cannot take this admission at face-value while disregarding the others. We cannot pick and choose what to believe. Instead, we must accept that he is at once good and bad, moral and immoral. Like us. Like Lolita:

> But somewhere behind the raging bliss, bewildered shadows conferred – and not to have heeded them, this is what I regret! Human beings, attend! I should have understood that Lolita had *already* proved to be something quite different from innocent Annabel, and that the nymphean evil breathing through every pore of the fey child that I had prepared for my secret delectation would make the secrecy impossible, and the delectation lethal. I should have known (by the signs made to me by something in Lolita – the real child Lolita or some haggard angel behind her back) that nothing but pain and horror would result from the expected rapture.[230]

Here we see Lolita depicted as 'cruel, a 'brash brat,' traits Humbert at least partially blames on her Americanness. But in debasing her, he seems to want to demonstrate similarity, to show that she, too, is fallible. However, the attack on her character is more likely the result of reality, the Lolita experienced in real-time, conflicting with fantasy. Polymorphous perversity is rooted in memory; it is a hearkening back to pre-sublimated proclivities, a reminiscence of deviant desire and the pleasure it promised. Humbert remembers in Annabel a purity lacking in Lolita. But Annabel remains to him untainted only because she has been edited in recollection. Olga Hasty addresses this predicament in terms of Humbert's compulsorily unfulfilled desire: "Even if Annabel were not dead, she would no longer be the same 'fey child' who entranced him. Humbert is at an impasse: Because his first love is both defined and sustained by unfulfilled desire, it must remain unsatisfied if it is to be preserved."[231]

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[229] *Ibid.*
[230] *Ibid.*
[231] "Time, Memory and Consciousness in Nabokov's *Lolita."* Pg. 230.

Toward the beginning of the novel, Humbert readily admits, "I am convinced […] that in a certain magic and fateful way Lolita began with Annabel."[232] While we will discuss this protraction and repetition of desire in greater detail in a later chapter, it is also worth pointing out here. It is significant that Humbert to some extent blends Lolita and Annabel in that the memory of the latter draws greater attention to the human reality of the former. Whereas Humbert initially imagines Lolita to be a chaste, if rather vulgar, adolescent, a nymph for him to drug and furtively deflower, she soon upsets this misconception by divulging the truth of her sexual experience.

In the beginning, though, he is both beguiled and maddened by her capriciousness. He explains:

> What drives me insane is the twofold nature of this nymphet – of every nymphet, perhaps; this mixture in my Lolita of tender dreamy childishness and a kind of eerie vulgarity, stemming from the snub-nosed cuteness of ads and magazine pictures, from the blurry pinkness of adolescent maidservants in the Old Country (smelling of crushed daisies and sweat); and from very young harlots disguised as children in provincial brothels; and then again, all this gets mixed up with the exquisite stainless tenderness seeping through the musk and the mud, through the dirt and the death, of God, oh God. And what is most singular is she, *this* Lolita, *my* Lolita, has individualized the writer's ancient lust , so that above and over everything there is – Lolita.

He acknowledges that in some ways she is an average preteen, consumed by what she sees in magazines and on television; stereotypically rebellious in her interactions with her adult superiors. She acts out, as adolescents do, in an attempt to map out boundaries. She is asserting herself in a world which is not yet hers to navigate. But then there is something individualized in her, something singular in a timeless, poetic way. This is Humbert's justification for loving her despite the prohibitions placed on pedophilia. The fact that she embodies both realms for Humbert, that of reality and that of play, is also what ultimately separates her from her predecessor. She is a strong-willed child and a whimsical coquette; she is flesh and blood and starlight and air.

[232] *Lolita.* Pg. 14.

Lionel Trilling finds, "The breaking of the taboo about the sexual unavailability of very young girls has for us something of the force that a wife's infidelity had for Shakespeare. H.H.'s relation with Lolita defies society as scandalously as did Tristan's relation with Iseult, or Vrongsky's with Anna. It puts the lovers, as lovers in literature must be put, beyond the pale of society."[233] This special dispensation, which we explored in the previous chapter, is what Humbert is counting on. He validates his lust by making it immortal, by reminding us of the timeless lovers Trilling does not mention, like Dante and Beatrice. Remember, he seems to whisper, that poetic love, unlike the myth of *true* or conventional love, endures.

But his love, however poetic he thinks it to be, does not morally legitimize his transgressive desire. This is why he questions her purity, brings up *her* perversity. For the novel, in as much as it is an exoneration, or attempted exoneration, of Humbert, is a trial of Lolita. It is, for all intents and purposes, a book that calls the victim to the stand. In her youthful, experimental world of fantasy, Lolita does seduce Humbert, though her seduction is superfluous to his pre-established desire for her. Before she kisses him and divulges her secrets, he already has a plan in place:

> I knew exactly what I wanted to do, and how to do it, without impinging on a child's chastity; after all, I had *some* experience in my life of pederosis; had visually possessed dappled nymphets in parks; had wedged my way into the hottest, most crowded corner of a city bus full of strap-hanging school children.[234]

Yet, despite his ongoing and explicit pedophilic tendencies, Humbert continues to implicate Lolita. The child, he shows, is still in the latent stage of polymorphous perversity; she has not yet conformed to the unwritten tenets of heteronormative morality. It is she who is libidinous, and shamelessly so.

Humbert attributes Lolita's immodesty to youthful experimentation with bisexuality. When they wake after their first night together in The Enchanted Hunters, he notes "Her kiss, to my delirious

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Trilling, Lionel. *The Moral Obligation to be Intelligent: Selected Essays.* Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1915. Pg. 338.

234 *Lolita.* Pg. 58.

embarrassment, had some rather comical refinements of flutter and probe which made me conclude she had been coached at an early age by a little Lesbian."[235] By her own account, he is not altogether wrong in his conclusion. In a direct address to "my reader," Humbert details the sexual experience Lolita gained at Camp Q:

> Every morning, oh my dear reader, the three children would take a short cut through the beautiful innocent forest brimming with all emblems of youth, dew, birdsongs, and at one point, among the luxuriant undergrowth, Lo would be left as sentinel, while Barbara and the boy copulated behind a bush. At first, Lo had refused to 'try what it was like,' but curiosity and camaraderie prevailed, and soon she and Barbara were doing it by turns with the silent, course and surly but indefatigable Charlie, who had as much sex appeal as a raw carrot but sported a fascinating collection of contraceptives[…][236]

Humbert juxtaposes the lushness of the innocent, brimming, forest with the depravity of its disreputable visitors. Yet it is because of their immersion in this forest, in this place of fairytale lore, that the children are no longer bound to the rules of society. In its seclusion, they are free to play. But theirs is a game of peers, in which each player participates to meet a challenge: to satisfy a curiosity, to show courage, to experience pleasure. One does not hold a position of power over the others. There is no hierarchy.

Humbert's polymorphous perversity, however, is at the cost of Lolita's nascent sexuality. His violations, his play, eradicate her sexual curiosity. In a conversation with Humbert, Lolita's school master, Miss Pratt, goes over the results of 'Dolly's' last report. But rather than addressing Lolita's academic success or ineptitude, the report focuses on her socio-sexual development. Neither the results nor Miss Pratt is to be taken seriously; the apparent function of the report is to imitate and deride Freud's theories of adolescent sexuality and the polymorphous perverse. Its conclusions are the result of Humbert, the aspirant psychoanalyst, projecting his own derisory assessments of Lolita through a person of authority. Miss Pratt explains to Humbert that Lolita is struggling with the onset of sexual maturity, noting, "She is still shuttling […] between the anal and genital zones

[235] *Ibid.* Pg. 141.
[236] *Ibid.* Pg. 145.

of development."[237] The fear, Humbert's fear, is that his actions, his imprisonment of Lolita in his world of play, have stunted her sexual maturation. Miss Pratt continues:

> [W]e all wonder if anybody in the family has instructed Dolly in the process of mammalian reproduction. The general impression is that fifteen-year-old Dolly remains morbidly uninterested in sexual matters, or to be exact, represses her curiosity in order to save her ignorance and self-dignity. All right – fourteen. You see, Mr. Haze, Beardsley School does not believe in bees and blossoms, and storks and love birds, but it does believe very strongly in preparing its students for mutually satisfactory mating and successful child-rearing.[238]

We must bear in mind that Humbert's memoir is written after Lolita's death. By the time he puts words in Miss Pratt's mouth, if that is indeed the case, Lolita's life, particularly with regard to mating and child-rearing, has proven markedly unsatisfactory. In fact, her joyless existence culminates when she dies in childbirth. The report can therefore be seen as a manifestation of Humbert's guilt. He has come to realize that her lack of interest in sexual matters, later evidenced in her refusal of Quilty, was the effect of his violations of her. In retrospect, he sees there could be no winners in the game he had played with Lolita. His abnegation of sexual normativity had led to neither unlimited freedom nor unimpeded pleasure; instead, it had led to her death and his literal confinement.

Michel's return to the polymorphous perverse proves equally dramatic. But unlike Humbert, Michel does not, as far as we know, act out his deviant desire or violate the boys whose virility and youth he clearly fetishizes. Michel seems to prefer the sensual, *touch*, to the sexual, *penetration.* His perversity is amorphous; it is intimated but never fully defined or realized. This inchoateness of his sexuality is made apparent in his first encounter with Bachir. During Michel's convalescence, Marceline brings the boy, whom she commands to "'Play by yourself. Don't make any noise,'"[239] to their quarters as a kind of entertainment for Michel. Bachir commences to whittle what Michel assumes to be a whistle; this act of course represents the child's world of fantasy and

[237] *Ibid.* Pg. 205.
[238] *Ibid.* Pg. 207.
[239] *The Immoralist.* Pg. 22.

play. But it is also indicative of the apprenticeship model of Greek love: the boy playing by and with himself, the pederast watching. At first Michel is uncomfortable and annoyed, but he is soon taken by the child:

> After a little while, I am no longer embarrassed by his presence. I watch him; he seems to have forgotten where he is. His feet are bare, his ankles lovely, as are his wrists. He wields his wretched knife with fascinating skill. Can I really be interested in such things? His hair is shaved in Arab fashion, and he wears a shabby *chichia* with only one hole where the tassel belongs. The *gandoura*, sliding down, reveals his delicate shoulder. I must touch it. I lean down; he turns and smiles at me. I hold out my hand for his whistle, take it and pretend to admire it extravagantly.[240]

The description of the scene seems innocuous enough, but Michel's diction communicates more than his captivation with the boy at play. First, he draws attention to Bachir's effeminate features: his bare feet, his 'lovely' ankles and wrists. He then zooms in on the 'wretched knife,' the unmistakable phallus. The question – *Can I really be interested in such things?* – signals the inception of Michel's self-awakening. He is at once terrified and beguiled: he is titillated by his sudden awareness of the boy's penis, but he is also frightened by it. But, even though male, Bachir is not yet masculine. Michel alludes to Bachir's androgyny in his detailing of his *chichia*. The garment is missing its 'tassel'; there is a 'hole' where the adornment should be. When Bachir's 'delicate shoulder' becomes visible, Michel declares that he must touch 'it'; 'it' seems to refer to the boy's shoulder, but Michel instead reaches for Bachir's whistle. The pronoun ambiguity reflects the equivocalness of both Bachir's gender and Michel's sexuality. The scene, far from innocuous, is charged with intimations of Michel's emergent pederastic desire.

In "André Gide and the Homosexual Debate," John Weightman explains that Gide, too, was ambivalent about the limitations and possibilities of his own homosexuality. He remarks, "Gide mentions incidentally that he had a horror of sodomy, and he frequently states that he is not an 'invert,' but without defining the term."[241] For Gide, as for Michel, then, claims to sexuality are

[240] *Ibid.* Pg. 23.
[241] Weightman, John. "André Gide and the Homosexual Debate." *The American Scholar.* Vol. 59, No. 4, 1990. Pg. 592.

whispered rather than announced, tentative rather than defined. I would argue that this hesitance is as much the product of the period in which Gide was writing as it is his incertitude about his own sexual identity. After all, he was a known affiliate of Oscar Wilde, who was jailed for sodomy; and even if Gide, as an open homosexual (or worse, an admitted pedophile), were to evade imprisonment, he would still be liable to public obloquy. This combination of sexual diffidence and fear of repudiation is indicative of the *fin de siècle* 'queer literature' unready, or perhaps unable, to commit homosexual intercourse to writing.

That is not to say that Michel obfuscates the direction of his proclivities. In one of the novella's more highlighted scenes, we see the univocal proximity of the homosocial to the homosexual. When Michel and Marceline return to his country estate of La Morinière, the property's pond needs to be drained, repaired and refilled, the process of which of course requires the removal of animals from the water. Michel works near to Charles, at this point a boy "who seemed no more than fifteen, so childlike the look in his eyes remained."[242] Michel's attraction to Charles is palpable throughout the scene, which again juxtaposes the masculine and feminine:

> I soon called him [Charles] over to help me corner a huge eel; we joined hands to catch it. Then came another; the mud spattered our faces; sometimes we would suddenly step into a hole and the water would rise to our thighs; we were soon soaked through. In the heat of the spot we exchanged no more than a few shouts, a few phrases; but at the day's end, I realized I was saying '*tu*' to Charles without quite knowing when I had begun. Working together had taught us more about each other than any long conversation. Marceline had not yet come, never did come, but already I no longer regretted her absence; it seemed she would have spoiled our fun a little.[243]

The event is homosocial in that it prompts the men of the estate to gather and interact, to do the work for which women are unfit. But the scene is about proximity: the approximation of the social to the sexual and of the men to each other. Although Michel and Charles here embody manliness in their effort to subdue and conquer nature, the scene is replete with hydraulic metaphors that point to both Michel's homosexuality and his adjacency to the feminine. Here again we have the

[242] *The Immoralist.* Pg. 73.
[243] *Ibid.* Pg. 75.

phallus, this time a 'huge eel,' that reflects the state of Charles's physical maturation. Unlike Bachir, he is already a teenager on the verge of manhood. Additionally, there is a suggestion of penetration and orgasm: the 'hole' into which they sink, the liquid that engulfs, overwhelms, them.

This is not to imply, however, that the homosocial encounter at the lake presupposes sex between Michel and another man or boy. Instead, I would argue that it speaks to the eventual transference and metaphorical sharing of sex objects. In order for this transference and sharing to occur, Michel and Charles must first be made equals of the same (physical/sexual/social) status. This equality is evidenced in Michel's inadvertent switching to the informal 'tu,' which, given the social power dynamic between them (employer/employee, owner/tenant), is by all accounts inappropriate. Again, Michel blurs the lines whose definition is imperative to the survival of the patriarchal power structure. This interpretation that Michel and Charles are now equals who can share and transfer sexual experiences would demand the delineation of the 'hole' as feminine and the 'sinking in' as an act of heterosexual penetration. The act becomes homosexual when we imagine that in 'sinking in' to a shared space, the two 'sink in' to each other by way of transference. In sharing the 'hydraulic' woman, Michel and Charles, too, engage in intercourse.

This idea of homosexual sharing and transference is actualized in one of the last scenes of the novella. When Michel returns to Biskra with Marceline, he abandons her one night to meet the now grown Arab boy, Moktir, in a Moorish café. Michel recalls:

> Some women were dancing – if you could call their monotonous gliding a dance.- One of them took my hand; I followed her; it was Moktir's mistress; he came too. The three of us went into a long, narrow room whose sole piece of furniture was a very low bed on which we all sat down. A white rabbit, shut up in the room, shrank away from us at first, then came up and nibbled out of Moktir's hand. Coffee was brought in. Then, while Moktir played with the rabbit, this woman drew me to her, and I yielded to her embrace the way you give yourself up to sleep.[244]

Michel is uninterested in the female dancers, whose 'monotonous gliding' seems to bore him. It is not them for whom he is there. The scene is set up for a threesome, but Michel is not there for that

[244] *Ibid.* Pg. 166.

either. He is there, first in that café, then in that austere room, to be close, proximate, to Moktir. Michel does not reject Moktir's mistress because doing so would be a rejection of Moktir. Instead, he allows to be 'drawn in' to her embrace, knowing that she is a sexual gift given to him by the grown boy he once desired. Moktir, in the transferal of his mistress to Michel, is himself offering sexual gratification. On some level, Moktir understands this. He stays, playing with the rabbit, so Michel can watch him, so he too can be drawn in, to sink in, to the now shared 'hole.' Moktir's mistress, then, serves a purely symbolic function: to connect the homosocial to the homosexual.

While as the symbolic vagina, the 'hole' can provide a means of homosexual sharing and transference, it also draws attention to its own referent: the actual vagina. The complexity of Michel's feelings toward women is seen in his varied usages of 'hole' and 'abyss'; these terms clearly indicate his inability to accept the female body, even his wife's body, as more than an emptiness, a void. When Bute details the sordid sex lives of the foresters clearing Michel's property, Michel admits, "His narratives emitted a troubled vapor from the abyss which was already going to my head and which I was inhaling with anxiety."[245] The idea of the abyss, the female body in Bute's stories, fills Michel with an unease he is unable to articulate except through abstraction. It is the 'horror' that cannot be named for fear that doing so might 'bring it to life,' make it real.

Michel's ambivalence toward women is further demonstrated in his alternating disdain for and fear of Marceline. This is why when Marceline suffers a miscarriage, Michel feels nothing before him except "an empty hole into which I stumbled headlong."[246] Here the empty hole is the childless womb, but it is also the nothingness of womanhood, the body marked by absence. In another scene, he notices "How drawn her features were," and wonders, "Did the two black holes of her nostrils always look like that?"[247] In him, we see an overwhelming averseness to and anxiety about the female body. It represents an orifice different from his own and different to that which he desires, but it also indicates darkness, an abyss that can consume and obliterate him. We see the female body as the hollowness of death.

[245] *Ibid.* Pg. 71.
[246] *Ibid.* Pg. 114.
[247] *Ibid.* Pg. 143.

This is the polymorphous perversity that Michel cannot name, cannot express in words. On the one hand, it is the *subject* of his narrative: that which lies beneath the layers of acquired knowledge; but, on the other, it is the *reason* for his confession: that which leads to his frenetic (re)tour across Europe, to Africa; that which leads to the death of Marceline. Unlike Humbert and Sabbath, Michel never articulates his desire; he never 'comes out.' Instead, his inclinations are only ever alluded to through metaphor and imagery, through the boredom with and hatred of Marceline he calls *love*. In this, Michel would appear misogynistic, narcissistic. One could just as easily argue, however, that he is in fact homophobic. He is fearful of himself and of his own polymorphous perversity.

There is then a clear trajectory in masculinist attitudes towards deviant sexuality from the onset to the latter part of the twentieth century. In Michel, we see the tentativeness, the posturing, arguably even the self-loathing. By the time we reach Sabbath, however, we see a nose-thumbing resolution, a complete, flagrant adherence to pleasure. Whereas Michel, at least preliminarily, tries to fulfill his patriarchal responsibilities as husband and father, Sabbath conclusively spurns convention. His marriages are not only destined but intended to fail: their collapse evidences if not his autonomy then at least his agency. He is unfazed by moral concerns much less patriarchal obligation. The revolt he enacts through sexual deviance is then open rather than covert; his tactic is not to infiltrate but to confront.

Although Drenka, in the final stages of her illness, asks Sabbath to foreswear other women, she too realizes that their relationship could never be delineated in the same way others are. Their bond cannot be solidified by conventional means because it is itself the product of renunciation; it cannot be officiated by vows because it, at its inception, was already a disavowal. This is why the language of commitment and marriage, the (often empty) declarations, are bound to fall short in signifying the parameters, or absence of parameters, of Drenka and Sabbath's relationship. For them, meaning is ineffable; it is that which language, as the codification of morality, fails to convey. It is for this reason that they instead rely on the body to express what cannot be said. Under the influence of morphine, Drenka recalls an instance that illustrates the body as contract. She remembers Sabbath asking to 'piss on' her and thinking, "'Oh, well, this transgression, why not?'"[248] The scene Drenka

[248] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 425.

recreates, unlike the scenes in Michel's narrative, is disconcertingly specific, detailed. Rather than obfuscating sex and the sexual body through symbolism, Drenka foregrounds the body. She recalls to Sabbath:

> "It came down, and as it came upon me, I realized that it was warm. Do I dare to taste it? And I started with my tongue to lick around my lips. And there was this piss. And the whole idea that you were standing above me, and at first you strained to get it out, and then suddenly came this enormous piss, and it just came into my face and it was warm and it was just fantastic; it was exciting and everywhere and it was like a whirlwind, what I was feeling, the emotions. I don't know how to describe it more than that. I tasted it, and it tasted sweet, like beer. It had that kind of taste to it, and just something forbidden that made it so wonderful. That I could be allowed to do this that was so forbidden. And I could drink it and I wanted more as I was lying there and I wanted more, and I wanted it on my eyes and I wanted it in my face, I wanted to be showered by it in my face, and I wanted to drink it, and then, I wanted it all the way then, once I allowed myself to let go.[249]

This is the actualization of Drenka and Sabbath's shared polymorphous perversity, the acting out of the taboo and the (literal and figurative) release of inhibition. The act itself is unsettling in that it threatens to topple our ideas about love and intimacy and the ways in which we are 'supposed to' express and perform them. But to the same extent our unease is testament to our own internalized morality, it is evidence of their escape from sublimation. Unlike us, Drenka and Sabbath seem free from sexual hang-ups and neuroses. Instead of avoiding the forbidden, they embrace it. The scene depicts the anarchic potential of play, carnality running amok. But it evolves into something more: Sabbath's urination represents an agreement signed on and with the body. Drenka continues:

> Then I come home afterward and I was sitting in the kitchen, remembering it, because I had to sort it through – did I like it or not – and I realized that, yes, it was like we had a pact; we had a secret pact that tied us together. I'd never done that before. I didn't expect to do it with anyone else, and today I was thinking I never will. But it really made me have a pact with you. It was like we were forever united in that."[250]

[249] *Ibid.* Pg. 427.
[250] *Ibid.* Pg. 425-426.

Even though Drenka asks Sabbath for a standard promise of fidelity to ensure that she will not be forgotten, it is the egregious act of polymorphous perversity that ultimately binds them. The commitment, the 'forever,' she seeks in her relationship with Sabbath is realized not through a declaration or vow, and certainly not through a marriage license, but instead through a corporeal contract signed in urine.

This act, which like Michel's pederasty and Humbert's pedophilia is remarkably, reprehensibly deviant, cements both Drenka and Sabbath's outsider status and connection to each other. In this, it also illuminates the conundrum inherent to the masculinist quest for freedom: while freedom demands isolation, exile, the quest to attain freedom relies on sexual complicity. Masculinism's rebellion, waged in acts of polymorphous perversity, is therefore dependent on the 'bodies,' the human connectivity, that render isolation, and thus freedom, impossible. But, for these protagonists, whose quest is doomed to fail, there is still something to be gained in acting out against sexual normativity: the return to and re-identification with the unsublimated, primal self. When Sabbath urinates on Drenka, we experience the degradation of an ideal, the undoing of *true love.* But what we are actually witnessing, however lucidly, is an extrication from morality.

Freud maintains that we are all 'deep down' polymorphously perverse and bisexual. This complex sexuality is the hidden, *human* truth masculinism, again piggybacking on 'decadence,' seeks to unearth and reveal. Masculinism hopes for a return to an authentic, albeit disproportionately sexual, self. For this to happen, moral boundaries must be pushed; norms must be challenged, even obliterated. This leads us back to where this chapter began, to the question of whether our sexual identities are constructed or innate, of whether what is unearthed is the product of culture or authenticity. In the end, though, it is the implications, rather than source, of sexuality that matters.

Each of the works, and each of the masculinist protagonists, understands that sexuality has always been categorized by that which is, or is deemed, natural and therefore permissible and that which is not; within the patriarchal social structure, different types of sex acts have always been either prescribed or proscribed to accommodate its aims to replenish its workforce, to transform libidinal

energy to performative energy (labor). This is why each work and protagonist recognizes sex as a potentially subversive, even political, act.

The next chapter will explore the extent to which culture, *civilization*, convinces the individual to forfeit freedom for comfort, autonomy for security. It will show how the idea of *happiness*, like that of *true love*, is constructed and marketed as not only real but attainable. Happiness, however, will be revealed as yet another of the patriarchal social structure's ploys to separate the civilized man from his primal self. The chapter will detail the differences between freedom and unfreedom and the way in which they, though essentially antithetical to each other, can be confounded and interchanged. In addition, it will highlight *time* as that which destroys, takes, but that which itself cannot be destroyed. In a return to aestheticism, the body will be shown as the locus of both pleasure and decay and the salient of masculinism's revolt against unfreedom.

FREEDOM, UNFREEDOM, AND THE DESUBLIMATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL

The question of freewill, of whether self-determination is first of all possible and second of all moral, is hardly new or '(post)modern.' In fact, it is a question that has been raised in every period of Western philosophy and that has occupied nearly all prominent thinkers, including Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes and Kant. Are we free to make our own decisions and act on our own impulses, or are our thoughts, actions, and even our desires determined entirely by a system of values that prescribes certain behaviors while proscribing others? Freud addresses this age-old inquiry through the identification of the *reality principle*, which defers the gratification of desire and sublimates the *Triebe* (drives), and the *pleasure principle*, which foregrounds (sexual) desire, fantasy and play, and resists sublimation. While the reality principle can be seen as the embodiment of civilization and its precepts, the pleasure principle can be viewed as the striving toward if not the realization of personal freedom and autonomy, the assertion of self. Reality, and therefore civilization, is predicated on the repression of the individual, who, rather than seeking the instant gratification of desire, is conditioned to instead put their energy toward work, culturally designated leisure, and heteronormative, procreative *love*.

As a literary mode, masculinism is driven by the conviction that freewill is achievable, that it is possible to break the hold of prescriptive morality and lead a liberated life. It sees freewill and its semantic approximates of authenticity and unhampered sexuality as rooted in transgression. Because obedience indicates adherence to the patriarchal social structure, transgression, or disobedience, must then evidence self-determination. This chapter will start by exploring this masculinist notion of transgressive freewill through Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents* and Heidelberg philosopher Erich Fromm's *On Disobedience.* It will then apply Freud and Fromm's theories to *The Immoralist, Lolita* and *Sabbath's Theater* and, more specifically, Michel, Humbert and Sabbath's quest for freedom.

Erich Fromm addresses this conflict between civilization and freedom in his seminal work *On Disobedience.* He, like Freud, sees transgression as the only means of escaping unfreedom. Using the biblical myth of *original sin* to illustrate disobedience as a potentially liberating act, he argues

that Adam and Eve's defiance to God and nature is what differentiated them – from both the world and each other – and ultimately rendered them human. He explains:

> They [Adam and Eve] were human, and at the same time not yet human. All this changed when they disobeyed an order. By breaking the ties with earth and mother, by cutting the umbilical cord, man emerged from a pre-human harmony and was able to take the first step into independence and freedom. The act of disobedience set Adam and Eve free and opened their eyes. They recognized each other as strangers and the world outside them as strange and even hostile. Their act of disobedience broke the primary bond with nature and made them individuals. "Original sin," far from corrupting man, set him free; it was the beginning of history. Man had to leave the Garden of Eden in order to learn to rely on his own powers and to become fully human.[251]

His argument echoes Freud's iterations about the inevitable antagonism between man and civilization. Man's own powers, coupled with the hostility he feels toward the strange social world of which he becomes a part even as he 'learns to rely on his own powers,' conflict with and eventually succumb to the pressures of civilization. Disobedience, or the "learning to say no to [the] power"[252] that comprises the patriarchal social structure, would seem to provide a means to get free. But freedom itself is elusive, precarious. While Fromm contends that "the capacity for disobedience [is] the condition for freedom" and that "freedom is also the condition for disobedience,"[253] he, again like Freud, admits that man is held hostage to the political and social systems he creates. He recognizes this (perhaps unintentional) abnegation of freedom as the product of historical circumstance, musing:

> When the medieval world was torn open, Western man seemed to be headed for the final fulfillment of his keenest dreams and visions. […]. In the centuries following the Renaissance and Reformation, he built a new science which eventually led to the release of hither-to unheard-of-productive powers and to the complete transformation of the material world. He created political systems which seemed to guarantee the free and reproductive development of the individual; he reduced the time of work to such an extent that Western man is

[251] Fromm, Erich. *On Disobedience.* New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2010. Pg. 1-2.
[252] *Ibid.* Pg. 9.
[253] *Ibid.* Pg. 9.

> free to enjoy hours of leisure to an extent his forefathers had hardly dreamed of.[254]

Even as man recognizes his own strength and the possibility of his autonomy, he undermines his potential for freedom by creating the statutes that, under the pretense of protecting him, inhibit him and his desire. He creates, inventing new tools, testing new hypotheses, erecting new governments; in short, he generates culture. In *Civilization and its Discontents,* Freud remarks, "We recognize as cultural all activities and resources which are useful to men for making the earth serviceable to them, for protecting them against the violence at the forces of nature, and so on."[255] These activities and resources are what cultural theorists would define as technology which, like language, sets the human animal apart. In this regard, culture, and the progress it engenders through technology, would seem liberating. As Fromm notes, leisure becomes possible through the alleviation of labor. This alleviation is of course the result of technology, of the tools forged for greater productivity and lesser exertion, but also of the hopes for peace and justice ingrained in our social and political systems. The amount of work to be done becomes as much an ethical as a pragmatic question. Workdays are limited, and culture, filling in the gaps produced by this newly acquired leisure, furnishes entertainment. "Movies, radio, television, sports and hobbies," Fromm states, "fill out the many hours"[256] freed up by limiting labor.

However, Freud warns that the establishment of political systems, technology and respite makes us neither freer nor happier. He posits:

> We do not see it at all; we cannot see why the regulations made by ourselves should not, on the contrary, be a protection and a benefit for every one of us. And yet, when we consider how unsuccessful we have been in precisely this field of prevention of suffering, a suspicion dawns on us that here, too, a piece of unconquerable nature may lie behind – this time a piece of our own psychic constitution.[257]

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[254] *Ibid.* Pg. 41-42.
[255] Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and Its Discontents.* Tr. James Strachey. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1961. Pg. 23.
[256] *On Disobedience.* Pg. 44.
[257] *Civilization and its Discontents.* Pg. 21.

Though the civilization we create does alleviate some hardships, the alleviation comes at the cost of self: the repression of our psychic constitution. The regulations we place on ourselves function only when we relinquish our freedom. This is why Freud so consistently and vehemently pronounces the requisite of civilization to be *unfreedom*, the very essence of his reality principle.

Freud often speaks of repression as a primary agent of unfreedom. Additionally, however, he details the internalization of morality that would lead one to believe in the polarity, and *knowability*, of right and wrong, good and evil. This introjection forms what Fromm calls the *authoritarian conscience*, which he describes as the "voice of authority whom we are eager to please and afraid of displeasing. The authoritarian conscience," he explains, "is what most people experience when they obey their conscience. It is also the conscience Freud speaks of, and which he called the 'Super-Ego.'"[258] This internalized voice is the echo chamber of civilization, the source of introjection.

All of this: the erection of governments and political systems; the creation of technology in the name of not only progress, but of reprieve from work; the voice of authority or the authoritarian conscience, would make civilization appear to be intrinsically beneficial; it must be *right;* it must be *good*. How could man construct a system that would undermine his access to happiness and freedom? And yet his system is unable to prevent or to manage, to cope with, human misery. Freud asserts:

> We are threatened with suffering from three directions: from our own body, which is doomed to decay and dissolution and which cannot even do without pain and anxiety as warning signals; from the external world, which may rage against us with overwhelming and merciless forces of destruction; and finally from our relations to other men.[259]

Progress cannot ensure our longevity; it can neither stave off nor prevent our demise, our death. It cannot conquer time. Technology is incapable of harnessing Nature or stopping fires, floods or storms. It is unable to render man omnipotent. Instead, man remains at the mercy of the forces that

[258] *On Disobedience.* Pg. 6.
[259] *Civilization and its Discontents.* Pg. 15.

violently, unpredictably, rage against him. Civilization cannot promise that the relationships we build will either last or prove worthwhile. It cannot promise that the sense of community and connectivity will compensate for our stifled freedom and ongoing suffering. Freud ruminates:

> It is no wonder if, under the pressure of these possibilities of suffering, men are accustomed to moderate their claims to happiness. Much as the pleasure principle itself indeed under the influence of the external world changed into the more moderate reality principle – if a man thinks himself happy merely to have escaped unhappiness or to have survived his suffering, and if in general the task of avoiding suffering pushes that of obtaining pleasure into the background.[260]

In Freud's myth of the primal horde, the father enjoys the gratification provided by the mother (or any other woman under his protection) while subjugating his sons to a life of work. His sole aim is pleasure. After the father is dethroned and both symbolically and literally annihilated by his sons, a new hierarchy is formed and access to pleasure is disseminated. The concomitant distribution of what was once exclusively the father's territory along with the establishment of rules to ensure peace among the now independent brothers represents the inception of civilization.

In this parable, the primal father's primary aim of pleasure is replaced by the brothers' want of security. The happiness the father had sought in sexual gratification is tempered in his sons, who direct their energy toward work, toward the erection of cities and walls, the forging of tools and weaponry. The aggressive energy used to dethrone the father, the selfsame energy the sons might have focused on the attainment of pleasure, is redirected in civilization. Happiness is no longer found in pleasure, but in self-preservation, endurance. The evasion of suffering, the avoidance of *obvious* unhappiness or displeasure, comes to stand in for the desire for and seeking out of actual pleasure, which proved both fleeting and perilous for the primal father. In this way, pleasure is indeed pushed to the background of civilization. Marcuse succinctly summarizes the lesson of Freud's parable, stating, "The methodical sacrifice of libido, its rigidly enforced deflection to socially useful activities and expressions, *is* culture."[261]

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[260] *Ibid.* Pg. 15.

[261] Marcuse, Herbert. *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry Into Freud.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1974. Pg. 3.

The desire, whose fulfillment is believed to bring *real* happiness, is either quelled – *sublimated* – or made taboo, but the communal security the sublimation affords would seem worth the (potentially devastating) pleasure lost. Marcuse explains:

> The reality principle supersedes the pleasure principle: man learns to give up momentary, uncertain, and destructive pleasure for delayed, restrained, but "assured" pleasure. Because of this lasting restraint, according to Freud, the reality principle "safeguards" rather than "dethrones," "modifies" rather than denies, the pleasure principle.[262]

Man's desires are not altogether 'done away with,' but are rather reorganized in a way that 'represses and transubstantiates his original instinctual needs.' Although this repression is not necessarily destructive, Marcuse notes that it does thwart the autonomy once relished by the primal father: "If the absence of repression is the archetype of freedom, then civilization is the struggle against this freedom."[263]

The implementation of unfreedom is contingent on the sedentariness of the citizens within a given social structure. To be controlled, one must be predictably locatable. One must have 'things' to keep them in place. It is no wonder, then, that people have come to place such high value on the idea of ownership. An immovable home is needed not only for protection from the elements and intrusion, but also as a vessel for storing material possessions. These possessions, the home itself often included, render the owner stationary. The owner cannot, and probably wants not, to abandon the things they have acquired; after all, these things now represent success and, by default, happiness. Pleasure is found in consumerism, but as Fromm notes, "Private property has made us so stupid and impotent that things become ours only if we *have* them, that is, if they exist for us as capital, and are owned by us, eaten by us drunk by us; that is, used by us."[264] This of course means that although "we are wealthier, […] we have less freedom."[265]

[262] *Ibid.* Pg. 13.
[263] *Ibid.* Pg. 15.
[264] *On Disobedience.* Pg. 52-53.
[265] *Ibid.* Pg. 46.

This echoes Ménalque's critique of bourgeois society in *The Immoralist.* Ménalque demarcates the loathed 'man of principle' as one with an intact 'sense of property.' The French bourgeoisie, he intimates, have become so enamored with the status of ownership, they are now blind to their own repression. This is evidenced in his initial reproach of Michel in Paris. Steven Curry acutely observes that Michel "creates the illusion of a 'safe' place in time, intellectualized, materialistic, and mechanical – all with a secure intention toward an idealized future and insulated from life and death. Unwittingly, Michel has created the world which directly violates the world of his 'self.'"[266]

But, although Michel imitates bourgeois society on his return to Paris, we need not see this as a true departure from his experiment with freedom. Instead, his sudden immersion in the society he seemingly disdains can be read as yet another act of dissemblance, an act to which his clandestine meetings with Ménalque are testament. He plays a role, sliding between the realms of reality and pleasure. In this regard, Michel mirrors Gide himself, of whom Wallace Fowlie points out, "He realized if he lived in accordance with the accepted moral system of his society, he would live as a hypocrite."[267] It is this hypocrisy for which Michel is called out by Ménalque; Michel, he observes, lacks the sense of property the man of principle displays while also, contradictorily, demonstrating the bourgeois values of being a husband, provider and expectant father.

The freedom Michel experiences in foreign Biskra, a theme to be further explored in a coming chapter, is neatly juxtaposed with the unfreedom that stultifies him in Paris. Then, in his familial estate of La Morinière, Michel seems to integrate these two polarities. It is there that he pantomimes the patriarch, surveying his land and overseeing his laborers from the back of his once wild (almost *untamable*) steed. But it is also there that he poaches from his own land, subverting the very authority he projects on his rides. Roger Pensom notes, "In both these set-ups, Michel achieves a short-lived sense of synthesis between the dialectical opposites of his personality, (a) the law-abiding adult and authority figure, governed by the Reality principle, and (b) the infantile accomplice, guided by the Pleasure principle."[268] Here, again, Michel dissimulates, teetering

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[266] Curry, Steven S. "Into the Shadow of Hesitation: Time and Identity in Gide's Middle Fiction." *Twentieth Century Literature.* Vol. 28, No. 3, 1982. Pg. 239.

[267] Fowlie, Wallace. "Who was André Gide?" *The Sewanee Review.* Vol. 60, No. 4, 1952. Pg. 620.

[268] Pensom, Roger. "Narrative Structure and Authenticity in *L'Immoraliste.*" *The Modern Language Review.* Vol. 84, No. 4, 1989. Pg. 837.

between his primal and conditioned selves. But this 'loophole' reconciliation of fantasy and reality is not real and cannot last. Ownership, whether in Paris or La Morinière, is a violation against both freedom and self.

While Ménalque and Michel, like Oscar Wilde and André Gide, both come to condemn the materialism evinced among the Parisians, Freud seems to take a more ambivalent stance on the consumer culture that comprises modern Western civilization. Though he stresses unfreedom, *repression,* as the precondition of civilization, he never actually denounces the idea of repression itself. In fact, he explains, most remain blissfully ignorant to their lack of freedom and restricted pleasure. To this extent, repression could be deemed not only innocuous, but beneficial.

Some, of course including the three writers whose works are being explored in this dissertation, are, however, cognizant of the repressive nature of civilization. Freud acknowledges that there are those indeed aware of their own repression, noting that there exists a "contention [that] holds that what we call civilization is largely responsible for our misery, and that we should be much happier if we gave it up and returned to primitive conditions,"[269] but he does not see primitivism as key to, or even compatible with, happiness. "How," he wonders, "has it happened that so many people have come to take up this strange attitude of hostility toward civilization?"[270] While it would seem obvious that one would feel hostile toward a social structure that deprives them their freedom and tempers their happiness, they ought to realize, Freud intimates, that they would suffer as much, and likely more severely, if they were to return to a more primitive state. Without laws to not only keep them in place, but to protect them from harm, they would be free, yes, but also incredibly vulnerable. Freud neutrally admits, "Civilized man has exchanged a portion of his possibilities of happiness for a portion of security."[271]

This security would naturally be undermined if the individual were 'allowed' to act freely without guilt or fear of repercussion. But these limitations to freedom are what ultimately drive not only Michel, but also Sabbath and Humbert, to the brink of insanity. Because they are, or end up,

[269] *Civilization and its Discontents.* Pg. 21.
[270] *Ibid.* Pg. 21.
[271] *Ibid.* Pg. 41.

devoted entirely to the pleasure principle, they find civilization inimical. Sabbath, Peter Scheckner states, "is the uninvited guest in a world he finds wholly antagonistic." Comparing him to Shakespeare's Sir John, Scheckner observes, "Not princes, kings or pretenders to the throne, but laws, sexual restraints, social protocol of every sort, and the political correctness of art and speech are what Sabbath most hates."[272] The same can of course be said of Michel, who ultimately repeats his honeymoon itinerary to escape the dreariness that overwhelms him first in Paris and later in La Morinière. And it can also be said of Humbert, whose entire narrative is spent defending the obvious wickedness of his sexual relationship with Lolita as well as the *artistry* he perceives in that relationship.

Merely taking Michel, Sabbath and Humbert into consideration, a few of the more prominent, not to mention deplorable, transgressors in literature, we can see how such immorality would impede the collective aims of civilization. As Freud notes, "The liberty of the individual is [or would be] no gift to civilization."[273] The liberty of the most dissident individuals, like those mentioned above, would prove decidedly less so; but it is this antagonism that propels masculinism. Masculinism is not concerned with preservation but with self-determination; it sees the happiness civilization promises as a hollow conciliation and would rather devote itself to a miserable but free existence than to a life of convenience.

One of Freud's main claims, as already mentioned above, is that civilization is incompatible with individual freedom. He ruminates:

> The urge for freedom […] is directed against popular forms ad demands of civilization altogether. […] A good part of the struggles of mankind centre round the single task of finding an expedient accommodation – one, that is, that will bring happiness – between this claim of the individual and the cultural claims of the group, and one of the problems that touches the fate of humanity is whether such an accommodation can be reached by means of some particular form of civilization or whether this conflict is irreconcilable.[274]

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[272] Scheckner, Peter. "Roth's Falstaff: Transgressive Humor in *Sabbath's Theater.*" *The Midwest Quarterly.* Vol. 46, Iss. 3, 2005. Pg. 222.
[273] *Civilization and its Discontents.* Pg. 27.
[274] *Ibid.* Pg. 27-28.

Although this passage appears to reiterate the same, and arguably obvious, missive, it makes explicit the often taken-for-granted notion of *comfort,* and its correlation to happiness, in the development of civilization. Perhaps the question is less whether an accommodation can be reached in an as-yet-to-be-conceived utopian civilization than whether the amenities of home (and other material possessions) compensate for the relinquishment of freedom. Marcuse succinctly frames this question by positioning Freud's postulate about human suffering adjacent to his ruminations on the benefits of culture, positing:

> Sigmund Freud's proposition that civilization is based on the permanent subjugation of the human instincts has been taken for granted. His question whether the suffering thereby inflicted upon individuals has been worth the benefits of culture has not been taken too seriously – the less so since Freud himself considered the process to be inevitable and irreversible. Free gratification of man's instinctual needs is incompatible with civilized society: renunciation and delay in satisfaction are the prerequisites of progress.[275]

The question raised is perhaps more important, or even all-important, to the artist, whose freedom is tantamount to their authenticity and whose suffering, whether experienced or observed, so often serves as the fodder for their work. Otherwise, why consider the question at all? Have we not already agreed that civilization has our best interests at heart? Have we not already (in)advertently agreed to forfeit freedom for comfort?

Marcuse explains that "in the 'normal' development, the individual lives his repression 'freely' as his own life: he desires what he is supposed to desire; his gratifications are profitable to him and to others; he is reasonably and often exuberantly happy. […] His erotic performance is brought in line with his societal performance."[276] This means that the individual grows accustomed to unfreedom, even in their sexual encounters. Their felt success is based not on their ability to give and receive pleasure, but on their ability to *perform* publicly. Their success in the realm of reality, in their political/social relationships, equates how they are esteemed as prospective sexual partners. Under the reality principle, then, social performance both outweighs and stands in for sexual

[275] *Eros and Civilization.* Pg. 3.
[276] *Ibid.* Pg. 46.

prowess. This of course means that the pursuit of pleasure as an aim in itself is almost universally abandoned. Happiness is instead evidenced in the acquisition of the things professional/public success affords, the connections and networks it enables and of course the free time it frees up.

But even leisure is prescribed in civilization. The free time individuals look forward to at the end of the workweek is not 'free' at all, but rather predetermined by meticulously established norms. It is filled with socially acceptable activities designed to alleviate stress and allow for relaxation without permitting pleasure to supersede reality. Marcuse notes:

> The need to 'relax' in the entertainments furnished by the culture industry is itself repressive, and its repression is a step toward freedom. Where repression has become so effective that, for the repressed, it assumes the (illusory) form of freedom, the abolition of such freedom readily appears as a totalitarian act. Here, the old conflict arises again: human freedom is not only a private affair – but it is nothing at all unless it is also a private affair.[277]

Marcuse makes two important points about the culture industry's monopolization of time: 1) entertainment makes the repressed individual feel free, and 2) the only actual freedom to be found is in isolation. Of course, freedom cannot be experienced within the communal social system dictating moral and immoral behavior and in which the freedom felt is really the introjection of that said system. This presents the masculinist conundrum we saw at the end of the last chapter: while masculinism's (sexual) revolt requires connection, *bodies*, its quest for freedom demands isolation, exile. This is why dissemblance *within* and dissidence *against* civilization becomes a primary means of subversion for Michel, Humbert and Sabbath.

Sabbath recognizes how work and leisure are manipulated to impede pleasure. He muses that most men spend their lives fitting sex "around the edges of what they define as more pressing concerns – the pursuit of money, power, politics, fashion. 'Christ,' he thinks, 'it might even be skiing.'"[278] Under the reality principle, physical exertions, like manual labor or sport (like skiing), quell the primal urges that might otherwise seek fulfillment in sex and violence; these exertions also provide

[277] *Ibid.* Pg. 224-225.
[278] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 60.

the individual a feeling of accomplishment that doubles as pleasure. Scheckner argues that "in such a world culture, individual morality and politics have long overwhelmed the human spirit they might have nurtured,"[279] but it is difficult to determine what that human spirit might 'look like' outside the culture in which it is embedded. Freud denotes fantasy and dream as indicative of this unsublimated spirit or essence, but he fails to comment on whether those facets of pleasure could be, or even ought to be, nurtured.

Marcuse clarifies that, for Freud, fantasy represents a mental activity free from the constraints of the reality principle, even "in the sphere of the developed consciousness."[280] He furthers that "as such, it [fantasy] continues to speak the language of the pleasure principle, of freedom from repression, of uninhibited desire and gratification – but reality proceeds according to the laws of reason, no longer committed to the dream language."[281] There are instances, then, in which pleasure supplants reality. In moments of 'fantasy,' a notion that references the *imaginary*, of course, but also *play* (the *Spiel* Jung found potentially anarchic) and *dream*, one experiences a fleeting break from repression. But from each instant of fantasy, whether experienced, as in (sexual) play, or imagined, as in (day)dream or even hallucination, the developed, stable individual inevitably 'wakes' into the reality they had momentarily escaped. This escape is sometimes entirely forgotten or only half-remembered. For most, reality invariably, expeditiously, regains its primacy. This is the return to the 'real world' with all its responsibilities and expectations, the weight of civilization carried by the unfree individual.

In *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* Nietzsche sees this return to reality as evidence of a productive renunciation in which the potentially free individual unintentionally forfeits his freedom and becomes captive to the very system he creates. Marcuse interprets this renunciation as man becoming the "slave of his own labor and the enemy of his own gratification."[282] This again brings us back to the question of freewill: "Will," Nietzsche writes, "this is the liberator and the joybringer: thus I taught you, my friends! But now this also learn: the Will itself is still a

[279] "Roth's Falstaff: Transgressive Humor in *Sabbath's Theater.*" Pg. 225.
[280] *Eros and Civilization.* Pg. 140.
[281] *Ibid.* Pg. 142.
[282] *Eros and Civilization.* Pg. 119-120.

prisoner."[283] Nietzsche of course sees this imprisonment as the result of productive renunciation, but it also speaks to the impossibility of freedom. Even if one were to break free from the morality, the *herd mentality*, imprisoning him, he would still never defeat unconquerable time. He would never evade death.

In her provocative treatise on abjection, *Powers of Horror,* Julia Kristeva illustrates the 'casting off' of identity and cultural signification through a theoretical lens at least partially inspired by both Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. In it she denotes excrement, one of the great, inexorable, horrors of civilization, as a symbol of death with the matter-of-fact assertion, "Such waste drops so that I might live."[284] Tony Fong elaborates on this point in the vernacular: "Shit. A representation of death, is expelled as a way to proclaim our vivacity. We are alive because we are not shit."[285] The act of expulsion is both unutterable and ineluctable. It is something hidden away, not to be discussed, but it is also something that must be cleaned up, dealt with.

In this way, defecation occupies the same social category as copulation. It, though natural, is rendered taboo. This is at least in part because of its association with the erogenous zones of the body; these are the zones in which pleasure prevails over reality, the zones in which morality is symbolically deposed. Of the infant, whose sense of morality has not yet been established, Freud quips, "He must be very strongly impressed by the fact that some sources of excitation, which he will later recognize as his own organs, can provide him with sensations at any moment…"[286] In self-defense, then, civilization must make sanitation desirable. It must, above all, 'clean up' and 'deal with' the body.

Freud points out that "we expect […] to see the signs of cleanliness and order. […] Dirtiness of any kind seems to us incompatible with civilization. We extend our demand for cleanliness to the human body too. […] Indeed, we are not surprised by the idea of setting up the use of soap as an

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[283] Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spake Zarathustra, Part II.* Tr. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Viking Press, 1954. Pg. 251.
[284] Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection.* Tr. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982. Pg. 3.
[285] Fong, Tony. "Matrimony: Re-Conceiving the Mother in Philip Roth's Life Writing." *Philip Roth Studies.* Vol. 8, No. 1, 2012. Pg. 72.
[286] *Civilization and its Discontents.* Pg. 8.

actual yardstick of civilization."[287] The body is kept clean and covered up, its functions made discreet. It is no wonder, then, that Sabbath and Drenka, who rebelliously yield to pleasure, would choose to sign their pact not in writing, but in urination. It is also no surprise that they would use the body, the organic, ever-dying 'thing,' to profess the immortality of their unconventional love and bond, especially once Drenka has been diagnosed with an incurable cancer. Ruth R. Wisse correctly points out that it is "only when Drenka discovers that she is dying of ovarian cancer" that she demands from Sabbath "the troth that distinguishes love from lust."[288]

The body, inasmuch as it reminds us of our temporality, of our *death*, is also the potential locus of freedom. In fact, Frank Kelleter attributes the lure of Sabbath's carnality to the fact that any type of sexual act subverts morality, reminding us of the freedom experienced in our primal past:

> Sabbath's unabashed sensuality owes much of its appeal to one of modernity's most deeply ingrained cultural assumptions: the belief that bourgeois society is founded on the repression of instinctual urges and that therefore any sexual act, even if domesticated in the service of familial and hence societal continuity, carries with it a forceful reminder of our forgotten animal past.[289]

The body civilization scours with running water and fragrant soaps in a vain attempt to 'wipe it clean' and to make it forget, is also the quiescent source of potential release. It is uncontainable, as evidenced in its excretions, the waste, but also the ejaculation, and is therefore immanently subversive. Sex, even when performed in accordance with social norms, draws attention to this inherent nonconformity. The body that can be punished and imprisoned cannot, so long it is capable of release, of *pleasure,* ever be fully sublimated.

Leo Bersani notes that Freud moves toward a definition of the sexual when he [Freud] outlines the "aptitude for the defeat of power by pleasure, the human subject's potential for a jouissance in

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[287] *Ibid.* Pg. 25.

[288] Wisse, Ruth R. "Sex, Love & Death – *Sabbath's Theater* by Philip Roth." *Commentary.* New York, Vol. 100, Iss. 6, 1995. Pg. 1.

[289] Kelleter, Frank. "Portrait of the Sexist as a Dying Man: Death, Ideology, and the Erotic in Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater.*" *Contemporary Literature.* Vol. 39, No. 2, 1998. Pg. 266.

which the subject is momentarily undone."[290] Sex then becomes a destabilizing force. Tony Fong further explains that this "disavowal of power and erasure of protective boundaries" enacted through sex "are often met with an intense, albeit brief, pleasure."[291] The project of our three protagonists in this context is twofold: on the one hand, it is merely to experience pleasure; on the other, it is to undermine the patriarchal social structure through either infiltration, *dissemblance,* or outright dissidence. In any case, the (excretive) body is both the locus and engine of masculinism's rebellion.

Fromm recognizes two types of obedience that might be useful in imagining this conflict between pleasure and power, freedom and unfreedom. He finds that "obedience to a person, institution or power (heteronomous obedience) is submission; it implies the abdication of my autonomy and the acceptance of a foreign will or judgment in place of my own. Obedience to my reason or conviction (autonomous submission) is not an act of submission, but one of affirmation."[292] The latter, autonomous submission, is clearly related to the notions of authenticity explored in the first chapter. The submission *to* self is also an assertion *of* self; a claim to truth beyond morality. Here again, ideas about right and wrong, good and bad, moral and immoral are unfixed, and transgression becomes a proof of authenticity.

This is perhaps why, as Claudia Pierpont Roth points out, "Roth has never been a particular friend to good boys. From the brash excitability of *Portnoy's Complaint* to the combative outrage of *Sabbath's Theater*, his heroes' drive for moral and erotic freedom – so often bound together – has inspired his wildest flights of literary voice."[293] Sabbath *is* outraged. The quest for freedom, inspired by this rage toward an arguably arbitrary morality, leads to a torrential, agonized, and at times agonizing narrative on what it might mean to be free. Sabbath's is of course a seemingly unapologetic, outright dissidence. After Drenka's death, he stands alone as one man against the system. Frank Kelleter attests that Sabbath's "satanic battle for 'freedom' […] shows all the marks of an ideological conquest – a fight not between autonomous individualism and repressive

[290] Bersani, Leo. "Foucault, Freud, Fantasy, and Power." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies.* 2:1-2, 1995. Pg. 100.
[291] "Matrimony: Re-Conceiving the Mother in Philip Roth's Life." Writing Pg. 69.
[292] *On Disobedience.* Pg. 5.
[293] Pierpont, Claudia Roth. "The Great Enemy of Books." *The New Yorker.* May 1, 2006. Pg. 1.

totalitarianism, but a fight in which one form of repressive totalitarianism struggles with another, quite comparable, one."[294] Michel, in comparison, is more tempered, less abrasive. But, he too can be impudent in his immoral narcissism and self-loathing: "It was almost as if," Wallace Fowlie muses, "he [Michel] were conscientiously trying to be wicked, in order to prove to himself that he was free 'beyond good and evil.'"[295] Humbert, though in some ways the most reprehensible of the three (anti-)heroes, nevertheless teeters between heteronomous and autonomous submission. While he does kidnap Lolita with the intent to at least fondle if not penetrate her, he also grapples with his conscience, his capricious awareness of not only the wrongness of his actions, but of the effect they will surely have on his beloved nymphet. It is his conscience that underlies his attempts at self-restraint, most notably at The Enchanted Hunters. In his introduction, Martin Amis quips that "openness and freedom" are "a continual reproach to his [Humbert's] own furtiveness and ignoble constraint,"[296] even as he pleads for an existence free from judgment. He, perhaps more than Michel and certainly more than Sabbath, has internalized the notion that "*obedience is a virtue"* and "*disobedience is a vice.*"[297] Humbert longs to submit to his desire alone, to have Lolita entirely, openly, but cannot help but seek out the approbation of his audience. To some degree, he wants us to change our minds about love, desire, and transgression; he wants us to not only forgive him, but to understand him, to somehow acknowledge the virtue of his deviance.

Humbert, Michel and Sabbath are all obvious threats to the pervasive unfreedom upholding civilization. Normally, one would be controlled, contained by steady employment and the acquisition of wealth and material possessions, by all things that provide the illusion of success and happiness, even when surreptitiously impeding unsublimated pleasure. Our three wayward protagonists, however, live beyond the reach of the social structure, *civilization,* throughout much of their stories. Michel abandons his teaching post in Paris; Humbert is a jobless French tutor; Sabbath is a disgraced professor and puppeteer. They all forfeit home for freedom. Because they

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[294] Kelleter, Frank. "Portrait of the Sexist as a Dying Man: Death, Ideology, and the Erotic in Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater*." *Contemporary Literature.* Vol. 39, No. 2, 1998. Pg. 290.
[295] Weightman, John. "André Gide and the Homosexual Debate." *The American Scholar.* Vol. 59, No. 4, 1990. Pg. 597.
[296] Amis, Martin. "Introduction." *Lolita.* By Vladimir Nabokov. New York: Everyman's Library, 1992. Pg. xvii.
[297] *On Disobedience.* Pg. 1.

all lack a sense of property and are all defiantly (if not intentionally) unemployed, they are untethered to the social system that would otherwise modify them and render them unfree.

When Michel's friend writes in his letter to Monsieur D.R., Président du Conseil, that Michel "*must have an occupation,*"[298] he is imploring that Michel be reinstated as a member of society. He is wanting to pull him away from Biskra and back to the bourgeoisie, to a life of dignity. But Michel's isolation in Biskra is what enables his freedom. As Fromm argues, "In order to disobey," to be true to oneself, "one must have the courage to be alone, to err and to sin."[299] Disobedience is after all an indication of autonomy, of freewill. Wallace Fowlie argues that in Michel's "desire to reject the laws of his society, he was not seeking any indulgence for himself but a form and a rule for his own life, a morality that would be his own, autonomous and independent of any foreordained system."[300] This desire to design a new morality in an effort to evince his autonomy is the crux of Michel's experiment with freedom. It is a reiteration of the perpetual question of self-determination: *Is freedom possible?*

Contradictorily, isolation can both liberate and constrain. Humbert is of course free to do what he will with Lolita because he has agency. He alone brings their isolation, their life on the run, to fruition. Lolita, on the other hand, is made helpless by Humbert's autonomy. Although Humbert tries to placate his lonely muse with the gifting of trifles, he is nevertheless holding her captive:

> In the gay town of Lepingville I bought her four books of comics, a box of candy, a box of sanitary pads, two cokes, a manicure set, a travel clock with a luminous dial, a ring with real topaz, a tennis racket, roller skates with white high shoes, field glasses, a portable radio set, chewing gum, a transparent raincoat, sunglasses, some more garments – swooners, shorts, all kinds of summer frocks. At the hotel we had separate rooms, but in the middle of the night she came sobbing into mine, and we made it up very gently. You see, she had absolutely nowhere else to go.[301]

[298] *The Immoralist.* Pg. 3.
[299] *On Disobedience.* Pg. 9.
[300] Fowlie, Wallace. "Who was André Gide?" Pg. 620.
[301] Nabokov, Vladimir. *Lolita.* New York: Everyman's Library, 1992. Pg. 150.

The passage is especially interesting in that it reveals Humbert's sense of guilt as well as his lucidity. He is cognizant of what he is doing; he knows his disobedience, his nonconformity and criminality, is a vice. He knows there is no virtue in his violations against the child he has essentially abducted, no matter how artistic or authentic he perceives his actions to be. He is also cognizant of Lolita's understanding of the situation she is in. *He knows she knows.* Only, unlike Humbert, she sees no art, no timelessness, in their illicit relationship. Instead, she recognizes her dependence and absence of agency. She knows she is beholden to her captor.

For Humbert, Lolita's captivity is a matter of semantics; it is about meaning, interpretation. Inasmuch as she is captive to him, she also captivates, beguiles. He is equally ensnared if not by her directly, then by his own lust for her. His infatuation is torturous. He, too, is beholden. But, then, he also agrees to the egregiousness of his actions. Guilt-ridden over her 'interpretation' of their relationship, he tries to make her overlook or, better yet, 'unsee' his transgressions. Bouncing between his self-assigned roles of father and lover, he showers her in gifts that bespeak his (illusory) adherence to the reality principle. They are mementos from the 'all-American' consumer-society of which she wishes she were a part: the tennis racket and roller skates for leisure, the manicure set and high-fashion attire for vanity. But then there are the sanitary pads – the reminder that reality *is* taking over; that Lolita is growing up, growing old…dying.

The isolation is meant to stop time. It is meant to liberate. But, ultimately, it forestalls. Humbert cannot prevent his nymphet from becoming a woman; Sabbath cannot help but return to the home from which he flees; Michel cannot refrain from writing his friends , from inviting civilization back in, even when he resides on its periphery. As Michel notes, it is staying free that is most difficult.

And it is the heteronomous obedience that is so challenging to overcome. This obedience is, as Fromm points out, what Freud calls the *Super-Ego*. It is the result of psychical conditioning that occurs first in the home, later at school, and eventually at work, in the political/social realm of civilization. The father's is the first voice of authority the child hears; it demands respect and inspires obedience. At least in Western civilization, it is the not only the 'actual' father, but also the theoretical father to which we look for both guidance and forgiveness. This is nowhere more

obvious than in Christianity. Freud maintains, "The common man cannot imagine […] Providence otherwise than in the figure of an enormously exalted father. Only such a being can understand the needs of the children of men and be softened by their prayers and placated by the signs of their remorse."[302] It is then fitting that Jacques Lacan refers to this *seemingly* reflexive, automatic submission to authority as *nom de père*, or the *name of the father*. Lacan, a neo-Freudian, uses the term to denote the unquestioned authority of the father in patriarchal society. The father, the head of home, enforcer of rules, embodies proscriptive morality; he is the one who says, 'No' and whose interdiction is absolute, unequivocal. Lacan explains, "It is in the 'name of the father' that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function, which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law."[303] We see Michel's internalization of this authority in two phases: first, as a son, later, as the family patriarch.

Michel's mother dies when he is the significant age of fifteen. This is the liminal age when, according to Heinz Kohut, a "reshuffling of self"[304] can occur in individuals not yet fully mature and for whom, Tara Collington explains, "there is not a clear sense of personal identity," and "the very structure of the self is thus in jeopardy."[305] The death of Michel's mother, whose Huguenot beliefs had inspired his initial probity, triggers this reshuffling and leads him to follow both his father's atheism and occupation. Steven S. Curry notes, "[…] Michel loses sight of his origins when his mother (the symbol of his origins and priority) dies; it is his father (the law-giver and authority) who guides him away from the lived-past of duration and into the exploration of the intellectualized past of history and archeology."[306]

Michel delves into his father's academic field, immersing himself in old books about dead civilizations. His is a sedentary existence, in which physical exertion is unmerited and sexuality, like the ruins detailed in his readings, is buried. This is no coincidence. Freud also notes that "there is certainly not a little buried in the soil of the city beneath its modern buildings. This is the manner

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[302] *Eros and Civilization.* Pg. 13.
[303] Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits: A Selection.* Tr. Alan Sheridan. London: Tavistock Publications, 1977. Pg. 67.
[304] Kohut, Heinz. *Search for the Self: Selected Writings of Heinz Kohut: 1950-1978.* Vol. 3, 4. Ed. Paul H. Ornstein. New York: International Universities Press, 1990. Pg. 623.
[305] Collington, Tara. "Gide's *L'Immoraliste* and the Psychology of Self." *Dalhousie French Studies,* Vol. 79, 2007. Pg. 59.
[306] "Into the Shadow of Hesitation: Time and Identity in Gide's Middle Fiction." Pg. 238.

in which the past is preserved in historical sites like Rome."[307] It is this past that Michel and his father so meticulously excavate and explore. Theirs is an act that both parallels and presupposes Michel's later uncovering, *excavation*, of his authentic self, of the self that was once dormant, stifled under 'layers of acquired knowledge.'

Literally assuming the *nom de père*, Michel publishes his first manuscript under his father's name and at his father's suggestion. Michel recalls, "He enjoyed claiming I was his equal, and wanted to prove it to me. The *Essay on Phrygian Religious Customs,* published under his name, was my work; he had scarcely read it through; nothing brought him so much praise."[308] It is fitting that Michel's first essay concentrates on the (overtly sexual) practices of the Phrygians. The Phrygian religion centered around the worship of nature and two primary deities, Cybele and Sabazius. Cybele, the *Great Mother*, represented the mountains and fecund earth; perhaps the greatest fascination for Michel would be the orgiastic aspect of her cult and fact that her priests self-castrated and donned women's clothing. Their castration was inspired by Attis, Cybele's lover who castrated himself in a fit of ecstasy but who was later revived by Cybele. Michel, so keenly observant, would have recognized the correlation between sexual euphoria and death, the lethalness of bliss. This would not be the only lesson from the Phrygians. Many of the Phrygians' religious customs were later adopted by the Greeks and at least partially influenced what would come to be recognized as *Greek love*, including pederasty, the model of apprenticeship Michel would use to justify his pedophilia.

Though the subject of Michel's work could clearly consternate a more genteel audience, it ends up earning his father praise within the academic community. This success symbolizes Michel's (furtive) entry and acceptance into bourgeois society. It also demonstrates his surfacing manhood and intimates his eventual replacing, if not *dethroning*, of his father.

Yet it is for his father that Michel weds Marceline. He admits, "I had married her without loving her, mostly to please my father who, on his deathbed, was wracked by the thought of leaving me

[307] *Civilization and its Discontents.* Pg. 10.
[308] Gide, André. *The Immoralist.* Tr. Richard Howard. New York: Vintage Books, 1970. Pg. 9.

alone."[309] It is then a sense of guilt that inspires Michel's decision to take a bride and, consequently, to replace his dying father as patriarch. This guilt is crucial to the preservation of unfreedom; Marcuse points out that "the price of progress is paid in forfeiting happiness through the heightening of the sense of guilt."[310] Michel conforms; he follows in his father's professional footsteps, marrying, and in time impregnating, his wife, because of his fear of disappointing his father and the proscriptive social system his father embodies.

Freud explains that "we know of two origins of the sense of guilt: one arising from fear of an authority," often the authoritative father, "and the other, later on, arising from fear of the super-ego," or the critical self-consciousness that is the result of cultural conditioning. "The first," Freud furthers, "insists upon a renunciation of instinctual satisfactions; the second, as well as doing this, presses for punishment, since the continuance of the forbidden wishes cannot be concealed from the super-ego."[311] But guilt need not stem exclusively from the prohibitive father. For Michel, before his 'reshuffling of self' and marriage to Marceline, it is his mother who prescribes (rather than proscribes) compliant behaviors by instilling in him a feeling of culpability. Driven by the religious tenets she so vehemently follows, she teaches her son to fall in line with her doctrine, convincing him of what he ought to be: devout, repenting, *good.* This maternal guidance is later offered to Michel by Marceline, who forebodingly warns him that his own doctrine (the antithesis of his mother's), allows for the survival of the strongest while eradicating the weak. It is also Marceline who reminds him of his paternal responsibilities to family, land, and servants. She encourages him to take better care of his property, especially La Morinière, for the sake of his unborn child. Hers is the voice of morality, prodding him, like his mother before her, to be *good.* But her implorations are for naught; Michel retreats from her words, abandons his paternal duties, leaving the weak, the feminine, vulnerable. Adolphe-Jacques Dickman explains:

> By the weak is often meant those that are most delicate, the most principled, and the most moral; because those who have not dared reject moral constraint cannot fully realize their own self and cannot come into close contact with those who might have helped him do so. Placed before this dilemma, the stronger are those who choose

[309] *The Immoralist.* Pg. 8.
[310] *Eros and Civilization.* Pg. 78.
[311] *Ibid.* Pg. 49.

> themselves, seeing unequivocally (especially if they feel real values in themselves) as much justification in this choice as in the less egocentric alternatives.[312]

This definition of weakness (which corresponds to Michel's own understanding of the term) echoes Nietzsche's assertion that morality is the manifestation of herd mentality and that the 'super human' can rise above conformity. He who differentiates himself, presumably through transgression, is not only strong but *superior*. In this amorality, if not immorality, can be seen as a (virtuous because unvirtuous) ethic.

Ironic, however, is that we often look to our ancestry, our *primal herd*, to both root ourselves in pre-established social systems as well as to evidence our uniqueness, *otherness*, within those systems: *I belong here because my father is from here; I am unique in that my father is from here, and my mother is from there.* Heritage is then a way to both conform and dissent.

Humbert already begins tracing his own lineage in the second paragraph of *Lolita.* He immediately reveals the dubiousness of his pedigree, divulging:

> I was born in 1910, in Paris. My father was a gentle, easy-going person, a salad of racial genes: a Swiss citizen, of mixed French descent, with a dash of Danube in his veins. I am going to pass around in a minute some lovely, glossy-blue picture-postcards. He owned a luxurious hotel on the Riviera. His father and two grandfathers had sold wine, jewels and silk, respectively.[313]

While the exotic nature of his heritage will be explored in a later chapter, it is here important to note that Humbert grew up in an avant-garde household in which short-term residents were constantly changing, constantly coming and going. There was no prevailing morality to proscribe deviant behavior or prescribe compliance. In fact, the authoritative figures in his family were not conformists, but decadents, whose livelihoods were rooted in the monetization of pleasure. They were the accommodators of lavish holidays and vendors of alcohol and exotic, and potentially

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[312] Dickman, Adolphe-Jacques. "André Gide, The Critical Novelist." *The Modern Language Journal.* Vol. 17, No. 7, 1933. Pg. 496.
[313] *Lolita.* Pg. 9.

erotic, merchandise. His father, like his father and two grandfathers before him, modeled hedonism.

On his mother's side, there are hints of the convolution of reality and pleasure. On the one hand, there is a rigid conformity; on the other hand, however, we see an interest in the esoteric, the (tantalizingly) foreign. Humbert recalls that at thirty his father "married an English girl, daughter of Jerome Dunn, the alpinist, and granddaughter of two Dorset parsons, experts in obscure subjects – paleopedology and Aeolian harps, respectively."[314] Clearly, her father was an adventurist and her grandparents, though dedicated to their religion (an obvious symbol of unfreedom), were also experts in subjects grounded in earlier, freer times. The one grandparent, like Michel and his father, was an excavator, who, however, studied not the remnants of previous civilizations, but the soil from earlier geological eras. The other was learned in the Aeolian harp, an instrument that intrinsically evokes the epicureanism of Greek civilization.

These potential authorities, however, are not fixed in Humbert's childhood. Humbert, similarly to Michel, loses his mother at an early age: "My very photogenic mother," he reveals, "died in a freak accident (picnic, lightning) when I was three, and, save for a pocket of warmth in the darkest past, nothing of her subsists within the hollows and dells of memory."[315] She is not there to implement rules or offer structure; she is not there to teach Humbert to be good. In her absence, Humbert's father looks to her elder sister, Sybil, to rear his son. Humbert's aunt served as "a kind of unpaid governess and housekeeper," whom Humbert, despite the "rigidity – the fatal rigidity – of some her rules,"[316] cared for deeply. Yet hers was not an impactful authority. Instead, it was the bacchanal of hotel living that exerted the greatest influence over Humbert: the leisure spent with his father, including the biking and water-skiing, the interactions with the alternating assortment of guests -the "elderly American ladies" and "ruined Russian princesses" – as well as his father's alternating assortment of "ladyfriends," the "beautiful and kind beings"[317] who fussed over Humbert and his motherlessness.

[314] *Ibid.* Pg. 9-10.
[315] *Ibid.* Pg. 10.
[316] *Ibid.* Pg. 10.
[317] *Ibid.*

The authoritative voice of the 'gentle, easy-going father' was then constantly deferred, while that of his aunt was (mostly) rejected. Interesting, though, is that even in spite of his colorful ancestry and unconventional upbringing, Humbert nevertheless grapples with his more conventional understanding of right and wrong throughout the novel. This self-consciousness represents his internalization of social norms and the competence of his super-ego. It is also evidence of his continued unfreedom.

Sabbath also loses his mother. The loss, though, is not caused by *her* death, at least not initially, but rather by that of Sabbath's brother, Morty. Until Morty's death, Sabbath's mother had epitomized moral rectitude. She had adhered to the tenets of her Jewish religion and had otherwise dedicated herself entirely to her husband and two sons. It is she who shapes Sabbath's happy childhood. But it is the inadvertent retraction of her love and attention upon Morty's death that ultimately destabilizes him. Morty dies when Sabbath is fifteen, the same age Michel is when he loses his mother. This 'double-loss' at that liminal stage results in a 'reshuffling of self' that Sabbath never entirely overcomes. He never pulls the pieces of this fractured identity back together, but instead resides between lived and remembered pleasure and loss. Even during intercourse with Drenka:

> He was pierced by the sharpest of longings for his late little mother. Her primacy was nearly as absolute as it had been in their first incomparable decade together. Sabbath felt something close to veneration for that natural sense of destiny she'd enjoyed and, too – in a woman with as physical life as a horse's – for the soul embedded in all that vibrating energy, a soul as unmistakably present as the odorous cakes baking in the oven after school. Emotions were stirred up in him that he had not felt since he was eight and nine years old and she had found the delight of delights in mothering her two boys.[318]

Sabbath seeks to reconstruct the happiness of childhood in his libertine escapades; for him, pleasure is tied up with his remembrances of a nurturing mother. It is no wonder, then, that he should think of his 'late little mother' when he "suckled at Drenka's uberous breasts;"[319] that he

[318] Roth, Philip. *Sabbath's Theater.* New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995.Pg. 13.
[319] *Ibid.*

should imagine his mother floating above him during intercourse. She is the embodiment of his boyhood ideals of love, femininity, and pleasure; however, the conservative morality she once tried to impart is lost in Morty's death. Sabbath's quest is no longer to please his delighted mother, but to recreate the pleasure he had experienced before she lost herself within herself. He is consumed not by the absence of her, but of how he used to feel in her presence.

Timothy Parrish notes that the renown Jewish writer Bernard Malamud "represented in his work the ethical stance Roth most wanted to emulate but instead pretended to destroy through the acts of his *shiksa*-crazed, sex-crazed, family-betraying, Jewish-son-protagonists."[320] Sabbath, like Roth, does not 'hate families,' as Gide claims to, but cannot help but confront them, to challenge them, in his quest to be free of them and the inevitable loss they represent.

Although Sabbath's father stands by him after his brother's death, Sabbath does not connect his father's memory to his lived experiences:

> To his father, who had never deserted Mickey however Morty's death had broken him too, who primitively stood by Mickey no matter how incomprehensible to him his boy's life became when he went to sea after high school or began to perform with puppets on the streets of New York, to his late father, a simple, uneducated man, who, unlike his wife had been born on the other side and had come to America all on his own at thirteen, and who, within seven years, had earned enough money to send for his parents and his two younger brothers, Sabbath had never uttered a word since the retired butter-and-egg man died in his sleep, at the age of eighty-one, fourteen years earlier. Never had he felt the shadow of his father's presence hovering nearby.[321]

His father displays all the attributes of a good provider and father and all the virtue of someone who has worked his way up, pulled himself up by the bootstraps, to live his version of the American dream. He exhibits conventional notions of manliness in his physically demanding profession and in his dedication to patriarchal responsibility. But his is not an authoritative voice; it does not resonate with, much less instill fear in, his son. Perhaps it is because his father fails to live up to

[320] "Introduction." Pg. 6.
[321] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 16.

his role as a 'no-saying' father; perhaps this is because (until Drenka) Sabbath never finds anyone to replace his mother as an object of desire.

Sabbath's guilt is inexpiable. Unlike Humbert, he cannot articulate remorse. Instead, it is made evident through the ghost of his mother. She is the good that could not endure, the good against which Sabbath now rebels. But his rebellion seems to be rooted less in political or (im)moral conviction than sadness. Inasmuch as he fights for freedom, he fights against loss. The patriarchal power structure eliminates freedom, but it also diminishes death. Life goes on, even after it has used up those who had tried to live it well; even after it has ended those who had tried most ardently to be good.

Michel, perhaps more so than Sabbath and certainly more so than Humbert, seems able to free himself from the guilt originating from 'fear of authority' and 'fear of the super-ego.' During his experiment with freedom in Biskra, he revels in his deviance, embracing his transgressive desire. One could of course argue that he *guiltlessly* flouts convention with fear of neither authority nor punishment. Anna-Louise Milne finds that this is at least in part due to the fact that Michel's desire is never (linguistically or otherwise) anchored in *The Immoralist.* Sex is never 'expounded,' but is instead only alluded to. "The superficial nature of the contacts in *L' Immoraliste*," she asserts, "figures a sexuality that is free from any anguish, guilt or resentment; a sexuality that does not confront the object of desire as intractable and unpredictable. It is properly immoral in that it dissolves the boundaries between people, opening up the prospect of a community of being that knows no divisions."[322] Seen from this perspective, sexuality, however deviant, can level and liberate human interaction, and for that, one of course need not feel guilty. It would seem that because Michel's sexual encounters are not detailed (and are therefore never made real), that they can be examined on a more theoretical level. But the ambiguous nature of his encounters should not exempt him from the persecution mania Humbert suffers, unless he feels his actions, in comparison to Humbert's, are in themselves exempt.

[322] Milne, Anna-Louise. "Gide's Polymorphous Perversity, or French Modernism's Arrested Development." *The Romanic Review.* Vol. 99, No. 1-2, 2008. Pg. 111-112.

It is no secret that Gide openly championed homosexuality and, perhaps less loudly, the Greek model of pederasty; in fact, this was the very purpose of his 1924 novel *Corydon.* Although Gide was less outspoken (and arguably less resolved) at the time of *The Immoralist's* publication in 1902, the perceived naturalness of homosexuality is clear in Michel's narrative. Because Michel does not feel his desire to be wrong, but instead to be something proscribed in order to preserve heterosexual normativity, he has no reason to feel remorseful. Fromm contends that "only if a person has emerged as a fully developed individual and thus has acquired the capacity to think and feel for himself, only then can he have the courage to say 'no' to power, to disobey."[323] It makes sense that Michel should realize his individuality, his ability to think for himself and exert freewill, in Biskra, where he is an outsider beyond the reach of French morality.

Humbert, in contrast, contends with the authority of the legal system in which his transgressions transpire. We see this already when Lolita's mother, Charlotte, is 'fortuitously' run over by her neighbor Beale on her way to expose Humbert. "Instead of basking in the beams of smiling Chance," he laments, "I was obsessed by all sorts of ethical doubts and fears."[324] He is eventually able, however, to repress these doubts and fears, and to chalk Charlotte's death up to good fortune and even divine intervention, *destiny*.

The tribulation comes in justifying his sexual relations with Lolita. He reasons that the law creates rather than reflects notions of right and wrong and that these notions are not fixed, but dynamic:

> The stipulation of Roman law, according to which a girl may marry at twelve, was adopted by the Church, and is still preserved, rather tacitly, in some of the United States. And fifteen is lawful everywhere. There is nothing wrong, say both hemispheres, when a brute of forty, blessed by the local priest and bloated with drink, sheds his sweat-drenched finery and thrusts himself up to the hilt into his youthful bride.[325]

He keenly challenges the patriarchal system by showing that even the Christian manifestations of the authoritative father, the Church (God) as well as the priest, at one time explicitly, and

[323] *On Disobedience.* Pg. 9.
[324] *Lolita.* Pg. 111.
[325] *Ibid.* Pg. 143.

sometimes still clandestinely, allowed for sexual relations between grown men and adolescent girls. The 'no-saying father,' he argues, had previously been 'yes-saying.' But his cognizance of the arbitrariness of morality does not eradicate his persecution mania. The pleasure he experiences with Lolita ultimately gives way to guilt:

> And the remorse, the poignant sweetness of sobbing atonement, groveling love, the hopelessness of sensual reconciliation. In the velvet night, a Mirana Motel (Mirana!), I kissed the yellowish soles of her long-toed feet, I immolated myself…but it was all of no avail. Both doomed were we. And soon I was to enter a new cycle of persecution.[326]

His guilt, however, is not in direct response to a law broken or authority undermined, but rather stems from his reverence of Lolita herself. He does not ask forgiveness from the Church or priest; he seeks no atonement in religious repentance. He renders himself prostrate not before an alter but before his victim. But she too is somehow complicit; she too is doomed. When the contrition he expresses to Lolita fails to quell his anguish, Humbert's super-ego steps in, demanding punishment. Humbert recognizes that "it was becoming abundantly clear that all those identical detectives in prismatically changing cars were figments of my persecution mania, recurrent images based on coincidence and chance resemblance."[327] His internalized fear of authority thwarts his happiness and prevents him from enjoying his freedom, thus keeping him psychologically unfree. His hallucinations speak to the guilt he cannot overcome, despite his dubious reasoning and laymen's logic. He remains beholden to reality.

Part of the governing social structure's ability to maintain unfreedom while enhancing performance comes from its success in prescribing sexual and gender normativity. This was already partially covered in the previous chapter on polymorphous perversity. Noteworthy here, however, is not the constructedness or essentialness of gender, but the ways in which gender roles are created and sold as natural. To ensure 'healthy,' procreative sexuality, myths about the quintessence of the nuclear family and the function of fathers and mothers are promulgated and internalized.

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[326] *Ibid.* Pg. 241.
[327] *Ibid.* Pg. 253.

In *Writing Masculinities,* Ben Knights explains that in order to read or interpret ideas about masculinity and femininity from a gender-aware position, one must "place in question much that is considered normal, exposing as profoundly ideological the tyranny of so much that passes for natural."[328] This would of course mean challenging the traditional role of woman as homemaker, caregiver, and object of desire as well as that of man as provider, protector and decision-maker; but, it would also mean challenging the motive for allocating roles to begin with. What does society have to gain in creating these cultural myths about what it means to be male or female, maternal or paternal? What is at stake if these gender roles are destabilized or deconstructed entirely?

In her detailed exploration on the construction of masculine identity, *Masculinities,* R.W. Connell argues that the formation of gender identity does not take place in isolation. Instead, gender is produced through an intricate social process that ultimately conceives a gender order.[329] This order is neither natural nor innocuous. It seems to thrive, however, by being imperceptible. Because it goes unnoticed, it seems to go without saying.

The masculinist work that addresses the established gender order most directly is of course *The Immoralist.* Robert Fagley identifies as his purpose in writing on *The Immoralist* to "examine *The Immoralist* as an expression of an alternative masculinity at a time when a much different one was recognized as the norm in mainstream French society: modern French hegemonic masculinity as instituted through a bourgeois morality."[330] In French society (and quite conceivably in parts of Western society still today), homosexuality was deemed, if not immoral, then at least feminine. It was not *manly* for a man to desire other men. In his comprehensive study on *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France,* Robert Nye explains, "For the discreet homosexual male, there was little need to fear direct police intervention in his private life; he had much more to fear, however, from the judgments of his fellow citizens about the *quality* of his masculinity."[331] This

[328] Knights, Ben. *Writing Masculinities.* London: Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1999. Pg. 12.
[329] Cf. Connell, R.W. *Masculinities.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005. Pg. 40.
[330] Fagley, Robert M. "Narrating (French) Masculinities: Building Male Identity in André Gide's *The Immoralist.*" *The Journal of Men's Studies.* Vol. 14, No. 1, 2006. Pg. 80.
[331] Nye, Robert A. *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. Pg. 107.

is perhaps why Michel chooses to recurrently escape rather than to outright defy the social system that would not only scrutinize and deprecate his sexuality but would call into question his very ability to govern, to lead. Fagley explains that "both Gide and Michel were born into a milieu where such a sense of honor was privileged, and they struggled with the possibility of damaging it through the expression of their individuality,"[332] and especially of their sexuality.

Freud controversially (and fallaciously) postulates that "women represent the interest of family and sexual life. The work of civilization has become increasingly the business of men, it confronts them with ever more difficult tasks and compels them to carry out instinctual sublimations of which women are little capable."[333] Although Freud's postulate is dated, sexist, and above all erroneous, it speaks to the then prevalent theory (largely constructed by Freud himself) that women were prone to hysterics and therefore unfit to govern. It is not insignificant that Freud's work and writing was extant throughout the Anglo-Saxon world during Gide's authorship. To group the male homosexual with the hysterical female would no doubt detriment his reputation and hinder his ascendance up the social ladder.

It is with this knowledge that Michel wavers between his authentic and performative selves. Fagley quips that, "Although Michel is shown to subvert certain aspects of French hegemonic masculinity (patriarchal authority, social responsibility), he, in fact, embraces other aspects of this masculinity like strength and independence."[334] The most famous example of Michel's assertion of masculine strength is in the scene with the coachman. Having recovered from the tuberculosis that had debilitated him during the initial phase of his honeymoon, Michel turns from an exclusively introspective existence to a more corporeal one. He becomes engrossed with his body and its health, strength and fleshliness; Fagley remarks that it is through his rehabilitation that "Michel's (masculine) preoccupation with strength entails a certain concern with virility."[335] Health, then, becomes synonymous with masculinity. Whereas before falling ill, Michel had been sedentary and fragile, more feminine, his brush with death inspires the extolment of his potential potency: "I knew nothing of life but what the moment brought to it, took from it. O physical joy! I exalted, O

[332] "Gide's Polymorphous Perversity, or French Modernism's Arrested Development." Pg. 81.
[333] *Civilization and its Discontents.* Pg. 34.
[334] "Narrating (French) Masculinities: Building Male Identity in André Gide's *The Immoralist.*" Pg. 84.
[335] *Ibid.*

confident rhythm of my muscles, O health!"[336] It is in this period of physical discovery and rapture that Michel's young bride, Marceline, is terror-stricken by the erratic driving of a drunken carriage driver. Seeing this, Michel instinctively springs to action, waylaying the coachman. Michel muses:

> I stared into that hideous face which my fist had just made uglier; he was spitting, slobbering, bleeding, swearing – a horrible creature altogether! Truly, strangling seemed no more than he deserved, and I might have done it…At least I felt capable of it; and I believe that only the thought of the police prevented me."[337]

Killing the driver would have been an 'acte gratuity,' gratuitous in its needlessness, its exaggeration. Michel's restraint, however, is perhaps more notable than his intemperance in that it confirms an internalized dread of authority that would otherwise seem entirely lacking. Freud explains that civilization "hopes to prevent the crudest excesses of brutal violence by itself assuming the right to use violence against criminals, but the law is not able to lay hold of the more cautious and refined manifestations of human aggressiveness."[338] This momentary fear of repercussion tempers Michel, renders him unfree, even in his moment of masculine triumph. So, although Michel seems impervious to feelings of guilt, he is nevertheless subject to the strictures of the power structure.

This modified freedom, though, does not discourage Michel, even as he mentally pieces together his doctrine on individualism and (sexual) authenticity. Instead, he embraces his new conventional masculinity and role of protector. Lois MacKenzie sees this acceptance of gender normativity not necessarily as an incongruity, but rather as a synthesis: "The beating he gives the coachman who had provoked the incident is invested with an implicit eroticism. In *L'Immoraliste* the erotic, the manly, the robust, and the healthy are coextensive."[339] Even as Michel begins to realize his latent homosexuality, he concomitantly begins to assert his masculinity. It is no coincidence that it is after his altercation with the coachman that Michel has intercourse with Marceline for the first time. He recalls, "It was on that night that I possessed Marceline." To his friends, the three

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[336] *The Immoralist.* Pg. 61.
[337] *Ibid.* Pg. 62.
[338] *Civilization and its Discontents.* Pg. 40.
[339] MacKenzie, Louis A. "The Language of Excitation in Gide's *L'Immoraliste. Romance Quarterly.* Vol. 37, Iss. 3, 1990. Pg. 314.

confessors to whom he is detailing his story, he then asks, "Have you understood me, or must I repeat that I was virtually a novice in all that has to do with love? Perhaps it was to its novelty that our wedding night owed its grace."[340] Though Michel attributes their night, and consequently his virility, to the newness of *any* sex rather than to sex specifically with Marceline, it is equally likely that his ability to perform stems from his sudden awareness of his own body and its ability to experience pleasure. But there is more to his encounter with the coachman that leads to his ability, and desire, to perform (hetero)sexually. In the previous chapter, we ascribed Michel's elation at the pond with Charles as well as his intimacy with Moktir's mistress to transference. We saw the extent to which heterosexual intercourse could be seen as homosexual sharing. Michel's night with Marceline, then, is likely prompted not only by the newness of sex or the virility he asserts in his altercation with the coachman, but by the idea of transference. This explains why the physical encounter with the coachman proves so arousing; it represents the proximity to a male other, the prospect of sharing. In this, the scene with the coachman is pivotal to Michel's development; it shows the extent to which he is able to synthesize his emergent masculinity and his latent homosexuality.

It is after these experiences that Michel and Marceline return to La Morinière and Michel proceeds to play the part of patriarch. There is a brief window in which he, his wife and their unborn child resemble the mythical nuclear family and in which Michel seems ready to settle into a life of domesticity. In contrast to the natural, untamed landscape of North Africa, the grounds of La Morinière represent man's ability to subdue and organize nature; it is here that Michel, at least for a moment, feels he can also subdue and organize his life as a family man. He notes:

> From this orderly abundance, from this happy subservience, from this smiling cultivation, a harmony was being wrought, no longer fortuitous but imposed, a rhythm, a beauty at once human and natural, in which one could no longer tell what was most admirable, so intimately united into a perfect understanding were the fecund explosion of free nature and man's skillful effort to order it.[341]

[340] *The Immoralist.* Pg. 63.
[341] *Ibid.* Pg. 71.

The natural land, like Michel's natural proclivities, is cut back, re-sown; it becomes aim-inhibited. In other words, the farm stands in as a symbol of sublimation. But it is not Michel, but Charles, the warden's son, who has cultivated the land and made it feracious. Michel merely reclaims it, takes possession of it.

As a character, Charles himself is multi-functional. He is the man Michel wishes to become, even though (at least in the first half of the novella) he is only *fifteen*. He is Michel's doppelgänger, the embodiment of what Michel might have been had his mother not died when he was fifteen, had he been raised on her estate. But Charles is also the boy Michel clearly desires.

Additionally, Charles is a paragon of French masculinity and therefore the standard against which Michel measures, and from which he distances, himself. It is during their morning rides that Charles shows Michel the land, details its occupants, and discusses the agricultural theories he has put into practice. Michel remembers how "he managed to make me share his hatred for fallow land and to dream with him of a more highly organized kind of farming."[342] Charles's farming philosophy is based on overseeing every corner of the land and keeping it fertile, *procreative*. This philosophy bespeaks the precepts of the hegemonic social structure that insists people, like crops, produce and reproduce and that they comply with a system rooted in surveillance. At first, Michel jumps on board with Charles's ideas, because he imagines himself to be master of his own land. Still taken by the promise of his own emergent masculinity, he recalls, "I rode the colt over the land, supervising the work, enjoying my authority."[343] But it is Michel who ultimately subverts his own authority and undermines the success of his own farm. It is he who proves impotent as a patriarch.

Whereas Michel clearly skirts the social responsibility the codes of masculinity would demand, Marceline epitomizes feminine virtue. This is most obviously evidenced in her religiosity. She demonstrates the feminine qualities of subservience and passivity, a relinquishment of agency, in her devotion to the omniscient, omnipotent father, God. She is loyal to this absolute patriarch, whose goodness and authority ought to be mirrored in her instead recalcitrant husband. When

[342] *Ibid.* Pg. 76.
[343] *Ibid.* Pg. 76.

Michel abandons her, either to pursue the Arab boys, to ride with Charles, to poach his own land, or to meet with Ménalque, Marceline turns to the faith emblemized in the rosary she carries. It is this rosary, and not her husband, she clings to when she miscarries and suffers an embolism.

Fagley notes that "Marceline's religious devotion is a weakness in Michel's eyes. That Marceline and, in fact, all women of her class were required to be chaste and spiritually clean is understood, whereas Michel denies any such supposition for himself."[344] Fagley also observes that Michel's own anti-religiosity might be understood as a rejection of both religion (a manifestation of the patriarchal social structure) as well as the feminine. He sees this rejection evidenced through "the mother, and the search for the masculine, as recalled through reestablishing the atheism of Michel's father."[345] Yet Michel himself represents a sort of synthesis of masculinity and femininity, and he, too, is unquestionably devout. His devotion, though, evolves. He no longer seeks or sees perfection in religious idols, but rather in his, his *body's*, potential. In this, he, like Nietzsche, is self-exalting.

The novella is replete with religious allusions and innuendo which serve to reimagine rather than obliterate ideas about god and godliness. We see this first in the letter to Monsieur D.R., in which Michel's friend remembers that after hearing Michel's story, "We went up to the terrace, the view from which stretches away endlessly, and the three of us like Job's three friends, waited there, admiring across the fiery plain the sudden decline of day."[346] The reference is not without irony. Job had been deeply pious and utterly convinced of the goodness of God. But when the devil argues that Job's devotion has not been proven since it has never been tested through hardship, God agrees to challenge Job by taking away that which has most contented him, including his health and progeny. When Job bemoans his existence and wishes for death, it is his three companions who both soothe and rebuke him. These friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, convinced that God would never persecute the innocent, try to persuade Job to repent. But Job, like Michel, is sure of his own inculpability, and instead of appealing to God, he berates him. He disavows God as "intrusive and suffocating" (7:17-19) and "fixated on punishment" (10:13-14). Job no longer sees God as a

[344] "Narrating (French) Masculinities: Building Male Identity in André Gide's *The Immoralist.*" Pg. 85.
[345] *Ibid.* Pg. 85.
[346] *The Immoralist.* Pg. 6.

benevolent father; instead, he perceives him as a tyrannical dictator, as an authoritarian who abuses his power.

Michel's friends want him to repent; they want him to acknowledge his complicity in Marceline's death and the foreclosure of La Morinière; they want him to atone and ultimately be forgiven. But they hope for forgiveness not from a patriarch, but from the patriarchy. Michel should not reenter an abandoned faith, but an abandoned morality. He should relinquish freedom in order to reestablish himself as a (respectable) member of the French bourgeoisie; he should reenter the herd.

This antagonism between devotion and repudiation, and the perceived femininity of religion and masculinity of abnegation, is apparent in Michel's memories of his parents. He recalls:

> My father is what is called an "atheist"; at least so I suppose, prevented as I was from discussing his beliefs with him by a kind of insurmountable reticence which I suspect he shared. My mother's stern Huguenot teachings had slowly faded, with her lovely image, from my heart; you know how young I was when I lost her. I did not yet suspect how great an influence that childhood morality exerts upon us, nor what mental habits it forms.[347]

His father's atheism is marked by an aphasia, a speechlessness, that fails to resonate. Instead, it is the articulacy of his mother's religion that shapes his 'childhood morality' and, ultimately, his super-ego. It is the words of Christianity that mold his worldview. But it is during his sickness and convalescence that the words become distorted and shift in meaning. When recovering in Biskra, Michel reminisces, "'I read these words of Christ to Peter, these words, alas, I was not to forget again: 'When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself and walkest whither thou wouldst; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands…'"[348] The biblical verse speaks to the inevitability of aging and to the imminent return to a more fragile, more dependent state as one approaches death. Michel, however, wants to perfect his physical shell, turn his body 'to bronze,'

[347] *Ibid.* Pg. 9.
[348] *Ibid.* Pg. 47-48.

and ultimately evade infirmity and oblivion. But it is his obsession with outliving death that leads to loss.

Inasmuch as *the Immoralist* can be read as the juxtaposition of masculinity and femininity, religion and abnegation, freedom and unfreedom, it can also be read as a total abandonment, a narrative of Nietzschean nihilism. This abandonment is perhaps most striking not in Michel, whose rejection is premeditated, but in Marceline who simply, spontaneously, lets go. When Marceline falls ill, Michel insists that she convalesce along the same route, and in the same hotels, where he had recuperated. Though they retrace his journey to recovery, Michel fails to emulate the care Marceline had provided him. Instead, he forsakes her when she is at her most vulnerable. It is after a night out with Moktir in Touggourt that Michel returns to find his wife blood-soaked with barely the strength to prop herself up. Michel expects her to be comforted, placated by his reappearance. But her final act is not of submission, but of renunciation:

> Against the bed, something hard under my foot; I bent down and picked up the little rosary she asked for once in Paris; she had dropped it; I slipped it into her open hand, but just then her hand went limp, and the rosary fell again. I didn't know what to do; I wanted to run for help…Her hand clung to me desperately, holding me; ah, she thought I wanted to leave her now, that was it! She said: 'Oh, can't you wait a little longer?' Then she saw I wanted to speak to her. 'Don't say anything,' she added, 'everything's all right.' Again I picked up the rosary and put it back in her hand, but again it slipped out – what am I saying? She deliberately dropped it. I knelt beside her and pressed her hand in mine.[349]

Here it is Marceline's aphasia that Michel finds most frightening. Just as his father's atheism had been marked by reticence, Marceline's once voluble faith gives way to silence in her final hour. Rather than 'stretching forth her hands,' asking God the father or the (would-be) father her husband for assistance, she lets her hand fall limp, breaking her commitment to the impotent father figures who had failed to save her and her unborn child. She dies believing in nothing and no one.

[349] *Ibid.* Pg. 167-168.

Her death evokes her query to Michel in his sickness: "'You reject God's help?'" to which Michel responds, "'I'd owe Him something afterward. It makes for obligation; I don't want any.'"[350] Michel's declaration is one of Emersonian self-reliance, the sentiment that he can fend for himself. It is not that he does not believe in God, but that he believes he is, or can become, God himself. He sees his own perfectibility. Marceline, however, renounces religion and the gender binary it represents; in doing so, she fundamentally renounces her own womanhood and identity, becoming the nothing, the abyss, Michel always perceived in her.

Ironically, this renouncement is itself an almost religious act. We see this willful abandonment, of morality, of home, of religion itself, in all three works. But the fundamental question of religion itself is perhaps most notable in *Sabbath's Theater.* Victoria Aarons argues that it is the "tension, this push and pull between 'Jew or not' [that] makes projected Jewish identity the single most uncompromising antagonist against which Roth's characters must contend."[351] This is particularly true of Sabbath, whose anti-religiosity bears a striking resemblance to piety. When Sabbath visits Norman for Lincoln's funeral, he is haggard, unshaven, and without material possession. Sabbath wonders, "Maybe it wasn't repulsion at all that he felt but something like awe at the sight of the white-bearded Sabbath, come down from his mountaintop like some holy man who has renounced ambition and worldly possessions. Can it be that there *is* something religious about me? Has what I've done – i.e., failed to do – been saintly?"[352] This is of course an inversion of the idea of religious martyrdom. Beyond just appearing saintly, Sabbath considers the virtue of his devotion to pleasure; has what he has done and failed to do been in the name of a greater cause? Is there sanctity in the renouncement of prescriptive (Jewish) morality? This religious parallel is best conveyed in Sabbath's postulate that "the core of seduction is persistence. Persistence, the Jesuit ideal. Eighty percent of women will yield under tremendous pressure if the pressure is *persistent.* You must devote yourself to fucking the way a monk devotes himself to God."[353] Although Sabbath seems convinced of his cause, there is nevertheless ambivalence in his devotion. Otherwise, the ghost of

[350] *Ibid.* Pg. 29.
[351] Aarons, Victoria. "American-Jewish Identity in Roth's Short Fiction." *The Cambridge Companion to Philip Roth.* Ed. Timothy Parrish. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pg. 10.
[352] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 141.
[353] *Ibid.* Pg. 60.

his mother would not continue to loom overhead and he would not continue to be tormented by his own repudiation of the values her specter embodies.

Women personify the religious devotion, one of the manifestations of patriarchal morality, from which Michel, Humbert and Sabbath deviate. Subsequently, they are, at least within the conventional familial/social structure, inhibitors of freedom and purveyors of conservative ideals. In the formation of cultural identity, women have assumed an important, though passive, role. Traditionally, it is not what they have *done*, but rather what they have represented that has been fundamental to the preservation of gender norms. They are the paragons of virtue, commendable for their refrainment; they are, or are at least imagined to be, chaste, abstemious, and devout. This myth of the virtuousness of femininity is especially salient within Western conceptions of family.

Although marriage, and subsequently family, comes to stand in for pleasure and success, the very *institution* of marriage is a political/social construct meant to ensure unfreedom. We saw this in the last chapter on polymorphous perversity. This is one of the reasons Monique Wittig argues that "lesbianism," a sexual identity outside the patriarchal morality that values female passivity, "provides for the moment the only social form in which we can live freely."[354] It is also one of the reasons Gide famously announces, "Familles, je vois hais! Shut-in homes, closed doors, jealous possessions of happiness…" He hates families for the comforts and conveniences, the confinement and cohabitation, for the unfreedom, they represent.

For each of the protagonists, marriage serves to curb deviant desire. In fact, Humbert's sole purpose in marrying Valeria is to quell his perilous sexual urges:

> It occurred to me that regular hours, home-cooked meals, all the conventions of marriage, the prophylactic routine of its bedroom activities and, who knows, the eventual flowering of certain moral values, of certain spiritual substitutes, might help me, if not to purge myself of my degrading and dangerous desires, at least to keep them under pacific control.[355]

[354] Wittig, Monique. "One is not Born a Woman." *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory.* Ed. Linda Nicholson. New York: Routledge, 1997.Pg. 49.
[355] *Lolita.* Pg. 25-26.

But the impossibility of the union soon becomes apparent, not just in Humbert, but also in Valeria. Their domestic life fails to stifle his attraction to pubescent girls or her interest in other men. "There was another thing, too," he recalls of their marriage: "Moth holes had appeared in the plush of matrimonial comfort. During the last weeks I had kept noticing that my fat Valeria was not her usual self; had acquired a queer restlessness; even showed something like irritation at times, which was quite out of keeping with the stock character she was supposed to impersonate."[356] The restlessness – the *ennui* – is the product of the prophylactic routine. Humbert marries Valeria thinking she will play the conventional role, the 'stock character,' of the virtuous wife. He assumes she will be chaste, abstemious and devout and that her temperance will somehow inspire his own. But that which is intended to cure is itself insidious; the tedium of marriage drives Valeria into the arms of another, leaving Humbert "with arms folded, one hip on the windowsill, dying from hate and boredom."[357]

Marriage does not cure Valeria's need for male attention or inhibit Humbert's illicit desire. Instead it exacerbates their longing for that which is forbidden. The banality of the everyday presents an obstacle to freedom, an obstruction to pleasure, for both of them. In this way, Nabokov seems to offer a fuller, more multi-dimensional view of female sexuality. His work refutes rather than upholds the myth of femininity not only in his depiction of the adulterous wife, but also in his portrayal of Charlotte, the distracted mother taken by Humbert's rugged appearance and foreign charm. More controversial of course is the attention he gives to Lolita's emanant sexuality, to the power of seduction he has her discover and exploit. In Lolita's character he not only refutes notions of female infallibility, but also those of the innate innocence of children. Really, no one plays the part they ought to; no one stands in for a convention or generalization. Instead, each character is uniquely dissident.

In *The Immoralist*, however, Marceline appears to meet the requirements of her stock character. In fact, it is not until they have already been married that Michel even realizes she has an existence outside of his own. James Day observes that she "represents stifling conformity and Christian charity, both of which Michel considers to impede authentic individual development, but as a

[356] *Ibid.* Pg. 28.
[357] *Ibid.* Pg. 31.

loving and yet totally separate other, she represents his only chance to transcend himself."[358] Her character's purpose, like that of the submissive, upright female she represents, is to *serve*. She functions as a symbol of female virtue and as well as an 'admiring selfobject,' the 'other' from which Michel differentiates himself.

During their stint in Paris, Marceline falls into the expected routine of bourgeois coupledom, entertaining callers and playing hostess at the countless gatherings Michel orchestrates. Although it is Michel who insists on many of their social engagements, even when Marceline is fatigued from her pregnancy, it is also he who volubly bemoans the commitments he creates. He complains to Marceline, "'And now, tonight, when I review the whole day's occupations, I feel it's been so futile, so empty that I'd like to turn back the clock and start over again, hour by hour – and I'm so miserable I could cry."[359] Fagley sees this contradiction, this adherence to and resentment of the conventions of marriage, as Michel's inability to want the things society says he ought to:

> Just as men of his time and station were expected to marry a woman of similar social rank in order to produce a respectable family and children with her, undoubtedly they were expected to want to do so. Michel struggles with these social expectations, the goal of which is to perpetuate the family as well as the gender order. Michel seeks to transgress the morality that depends on such institutions.[360]

Fagley identifies the nuclear family as "an agent of homogenous gender enforcement"[361] used to promote heteronormative, reproduction sexuality and to deter sexual deviance. The family becomes an emblem of something 'higher' than mere desire; it becomes an emblem of *love*. But, as we saw in the previous chapter, the concept of love is itself saturated in (politicized) meaning. Mackenzie points out that "Michel feels compelled to qualify or justify his love for Marceline. As a consequence, the reader comes away with the sense of a dispassionate, polite affection expressing little more than a conventional or institutional relationship."[362] This dispassion, though, is arguably

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[358] Day, James T. "The Structure of Education in Gide's *L'Immoraliste.*" *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures.* Vol. 46, Iss. 1, 1992. Pg. 29.

[359] *The Immoralist.* Pg. 92.
[360] "Narrating (French) Masculinities: Building Male Identity in André Gide's *The Immoralist.*" Pg. 86.
[361] *Ibid.*
[362] "The Language of Excitation in Gide's *L'Immoraliste.*" Pg. 310.

less the result of Michel's disdain or indifference to Marceline than to his cognizance that marriage is an institution, that it is a means to repress his authentic self while concomitantly convincing him of his happiness. This cognizance is at least in part due to his conversations with Ménalque, which also take place in Paris. The city, then, becomes the locus of the conflict between conformity and dissidence. Albert Sonnenfeld writes:

> Gide may be revealing his [own] pederasty, his infidelity and his pseudo-Nietzschean and Whitmanian penchants in *L'Immoralist*, but his real psychography is hidden behind the guilt-covering of the philosophical dialect between Marceline's Christian ethic and Ménalque's Virgilian paganism which Michel's hesitant middle position fails to synthesize.[363]

It is in Paris that Michel realizes his inability to meet the demands of a conventional marriage while staying, or becoming, true to himself. And it is Ménalque's influence that eclipses the pressure Michel feels to conform; it is Ménalque's voice, and not Marceline's, that resonates, transforms.

In Michel, we see the irreconcilability of the authentic, evidenced in his furtive conversations with Ménalque, and the performative, seen in his botched attempts to play Marceline's devoted husband and Parisian society's steadfast patriarch. Because the furtive, *intimate,* conversations take place outside of his marriage, the marriage itself fails to serve as a refuge from the outside world. Marcuse details Freud's understanding of the potential for marital closeness:

> The conflict between civilization and sexuality is caused by the circumstance that sexual love is a relationship between two people, in which a third can only be superfluous or disturbing, whereas civilization is founded on relations between larger groups of persons. When a love relationship is at its height nor room is left for any interest in the surrounding world; the pair of lovers are sufficient unto themselves, do not even need the child they have in common to make them happy.[364]

[363] Sonnenfeld, Albert. "On Readers and Reading in *La Porte etroite* and *L'Immoraliste.*" *Romantic Review* Vol. 67, Iss. 3, 1976. Pg. 184.
[364] *Eros and Civilization.* Pg. 41.

Here, Freud seems to contradict his own notions about polymorphous perversity while propagating the actuality of true love; it seems, if we use *The Immoralist* as an example, that Marceline and Michel's marriage, though the product of convention, ought to afford them happiness. But I would argue that he is using love as a way to juxtapose two different spheres of existence: the private and the public. The former is the realm of intimacy, in which pleasure can be experienced between two people, in this scenario a husband and wife. In the moment of intimacy, the outside world, *reality,* is forgotten. The height of this love relationship, however, is momentary, fleeting. There can be no protraction of happiness between the couple, and the small happiness they do experience is prescribed, sanctioned. The child they share regains their primacy in the familial unit, especially for the mother who cares for them, and the outside world steals away their attention, demanding at least the father's engagement. The public sphere is more peopled and complicated and the dynamics within that sphere are ever contracting, expanding and evolving. Although these spheres, the public and private, are theoretically separate, they are nevertheless contingent on one another. The mother and father produce the future work force of civilization, and the very existence of vulnerable dependents, the wife and children, provide the motivation for the father to continue contributing in the public sphere.

Ménalque contends that both spheres represent the aims of civilization, that both constrain, rendering the individual unfree. He surmises that voyaging, escaping the potential place of persecution, is the only means to freedom. It is during his own trip to Biskra that he hears of Michel's fondness of the 'Arab boys,' and the pleasure Michel had taken in watching Moktir steal Marceline's scissors. This information indicates a lack of propriety in Michel that Ménalque identifies as authentic, and it is the reason Ménalque tries to convince Michel to leave Paris with him. He maintains that together they could find truth and freedom abroad. Sabbath, however, insists that the struggle for freedom take place not in foreign lands, but on the human body. Frank Kelleter notes:

> The act of sex indeed seems to imply an ultimate *transgression* – a violent thrust beyond the bounds of social organization into a realm of existence that not only emancipates the sexual body from societal constraints but actually endangers all ideological and institutional

> securities on which the health and continuity of bourgeois society is said to depend.[365]

Sex, even prescribed sex between a husband and wife, as we have already noted, is an uncontainable act and is therefore in itself potentially subversive. It must be cleaned up; it must not be spoken about. Though sex is both inevitable and imperative, it must, within civilization, take place quietly, furtively. Sabbath, who seemingly recognizes all this, cannot be contented with conventional coitus. He gets no pleasure from conjugal intercourse; he marries first Nikki and later Roseanna with every intention of having extramarital relations. For him, infidelity is 'virtuous' in that it is proscribed, transgressive. Kelleter quips that "Sabbath never manages to shake off his self-righteous belief in the *extra*ordinary nature of his subversions,"[366] or the feeling that he is an *Uber*-non-conformist, a paragon of non-virtue. It is in this radical break from convention that Sabbath tests his theory of freedom.

So far, we have explored masculinism as a literary mode or artistic movement that renounces the tenets of the patriarchal social structure (*civilization, morality*) instead seeking meaning (authenticity) in sexual transgression. We have also looked at masculinism as a rebellion against that social structure. Because masculinism perceives the extent to which civilization impedes freedom, it resolves to undermine cultural sublimation through dissidence and dissemblance. This rebellion takes place as one man against the world; because of this, it is bound to fall short. But masculinism does find success, as a mode, movement and rebellion, in that, in addition to being all these things, it is also a unifying doctrine, a common disavowal. Michel, Humbert and Sabbath, as masculinist protagonists, serve as mouthpieces of this doctrine. Their aim is not merely to shock or call into question; it is to gain fellowship.

Sabbath, like all 'scholars,' seeks out pupils to whom he can impart his discoveries. This is obvious in all his relationships. Nikki is his first protégé, the capricious actress whom he casts in off-Broadway productions. She is the brilliant performer who, however, ceases to captivate off-stage. It is during his marriage to Nikki that Sabbath begins his affair with Roseanna, the adroit puppet-

[365] "Portrait of the Sexist as a Dying Man: Death, Ideology, and the Erotic in Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater.*" Pg. 266.
[366] *Ibid.* Pg. 299.

maker for his Indecent Theater. Both women can be viewed as apprentices in *his* world; he educates them in the private, sexual sphere as well as the public, professional one. They are under his tutelage, following his divergent path. When he rescinds his affection, they are lost, unanchored. To this end, his teachings never liberate them, but instead render them vulnerable, unable to navigate the public sphere from which Sabbath and his unconventional 'doctrine' had unhinged them. It is no wonder that Nikki ends up literally and symbolically lost, and that Roseanna seeks solace in Chardonnay.

Although his story is peppered with other pupils, most notably his actual student Kathy Goolsbee, it is of course Drenka who proves Sabbath's greatest, most ardent disciple. Joel Diggory identifies the moment of their pact as evidence of Drenka's adherence to Sabbath's philosophy: "For Drenka this sexual event has all the significance of a sacred ritual, a religious "rite" that initiates her into bodily maturity – 'You taught me everything […] To be free to fuck. To have a good time with my body' (428) – within a scene suffused with redemptive resonance of a sexual return to nature ('In the woods' amongst 'the stream')."[367] Her return to a pre-sublimated state is inspired by Sabbath's teachings; her 'primitivism' the result of his anti-conventionalism.

Sabbath, like Michel and Humbert, is a sort of teacher by trade. Interesting, though, is that each uses his position to disseminate a non-traditional worldview rooted in the freeing of the libido. Whereas education is largely associated with unfreedom in that schools and colleges are established in the service of civilization, our three protagonists use their positions to subvert traditional educational models and to indoctrinate others in their systemic immorality.

The power dynamic between teacher and pupil is at least touched on if not highlighted in each of the novels. We see this in *Lolita*, when Humbert uses his multilingualism to establish his academic superiority and to draw Lolita's friend, Eva Rosen, into his web of seduction. Humbert admits, "I spoke French to her (much to Lo's disgust)."[368] Lolita of course understands what Humbert is doing. At this point in the novel, she is in the final stage of 'nymphancy' and Humbert, despite his

[367] Diggory, Joel. "'Tragedy Wrought to its Uttermost': Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater* and the Art of Dying." *Philip Roth Studies.* Vol. 12, No. 2, 2016. Pg. 52.
[368] *Lolita.* Pg. 201.

professed love, is starting to lose interest in her as an object of desire. His markedly foreign erudition is the leverage he uses to entrance (or to try to entrance) Lolita's young classmates. Humbert's flirtations, however, lead nowhere. He is unable to exploit his perceived position of power, unlike his acquaintance, the esteemed instructor Gaston Godin, whose character is fittingly modeled after André Gide. Humbert complains of Godin:

> There he was, devoid of any talent whatsoever, a mediocre teacher, a worthless scholar, a glum repulsive fat old invert, highly contemptuous of the American way of life, triumphantly ignorant of the English language – there he was in priggish New England, crooned over by the old and caressed by the young – oh, and having a grand time and fooling everybody; and here I was.[369]

Godin, the school's French teacher, is able to use his felt academic refinement to place himself in a position of trust with faculty, parents and students, and to thus gain access to the young, male pupils he 'innocently' invites over to play chess and eat bonbons. Whether Godin is as unsuccessful as Humbert in his actual aim remains, however, unclear.

Michel is different from Humbert and Sabbath in that he is still in the liminal stage of becoming. He is both a teacher and a pupil; his academic focus, not surprisingly, adjusts to what he learns about himself in Biskra and about nomadic freedom from Ménalque. Michel's private conversations with Ménalque replicate those between Gide and his own recusant mentor, Oscar Wilde. Jonathan Dollimore asserts that when Gide and Wilde meet in North Africa, Gide "does indeed suffer an erasure of self, a decentering which is also the precondition for admitting transgressive desire, a depersonalization which is therefore also a liberation."[370] This mentor-protégé relationship is mirrored in the novella, as we witness Michel's self-discovery that is at least partially inspired by Menalque's anti-conformist ideology. Day convincingly argues that although *The Immoralist* presents variations on apprenticeship models, it:

> quite visibly is not only about self-discovery, for it accords equal or greater important to the harmonies and dissonances between individual and society. To integrate these two orientations – psychological and social – *L'Immoraliste* assumes a generic

[369] *Ibid.* Pg. 194.
[370] *Sexual Dissidence.* Pg. 17.

> structure that derives from the conventions of the novel of education, or Bildungsroman.[371]

The *Bildungsroman* traditionally focuses on the formative experiences and realizations in a character's development; it is a coming-of-age novel that shows the protagonist's transition to adulthood. Day, however, sees Michel's development not only through what he learns, especially during his convalescence and talks with Ménalque, but also through what he unlearns. After all, Michel does not begin the novel an immoralist. Day explains:

> Michel's story is like a long parable. The attendant dominance of summary over scene is made plausible and natural, however, by the premise that Michel is telling his story to friends in the course of a long evening. Another parameter of the story that results in greater didactic efficiency is Michel's calling as a scholar. Like all scholars, Michel is devoted to learning, but with some significant deviations from the usually scholarly orientation. Michel's passion for learning at the outset of the story is, somewhat paradoxically, the result of moral instruction received from the mother, now deceased. While the content of this "grave enseignement huguenot" is no longer a concern for Michel, the structure of its acquisition has molded his mind.[372]

Michel's scholarship serves as both a theme and a narrative frame. At the start of the novella, Michel is educated by his mother's rigid Huguenot morality as well as by his father's meticulous analyses of ancient civilizations. Their incongruous teachings leave him bookishly clever, but also sexually naïve if not altogether developmentally stunted. It is when he studies himself, his body and its sensations, that he begins to unlearn his mother's mores and father's schooling. "My sole effort, a constant effort then" he recalls, "was […] systematically to revile or suppress whatever I believed due merely to past education and to my early moral indoctrination."[373] His new self-awareness leads him to a new area of academic interest: the authenticity of primitivism. At the College de France, Michel gives controversial lectures on the preponderance of barbarism to sublimation. He notes:

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[371] "The Structure of Education in Gide's *L'Immoraliste.*" Pg. 24.
[372] *Ibid.* Pg. 26.
[373] *The Immoralist.* Pg. 53.

> By a kind of natural reaction, even as my life was assuming an order and a shape, even as I delighted in ordering and shaping everything around me too, I grew increasingly enthusiastic about the crude morality of the Goths, and while throughout my lectures I insisted, with a boldness which was later the subject of some criticism, on exalting and even justifying savagery, I laboriously strove to master if not to suppress everything that might imply it around me and within me.[374]

The lectures represent the masculinist doctrine and hint at the ultimate renunciation that Michel, still dissembling, tries to master, to suppress, during his professorship. But his selves, the performative and the authentic, are irreconcilable; he must forfeit the one so that the other might thrive. He must either adhere to the presumably more authentic attitudes of the Goths or devote himself entirely to a less free but unquestionably more secure existence within the confines of Western civilization. But this decision cannot engender a happy resolution. Day admits that though Michel's learning is generally positive in that "he discovers the power of the will, the existential and the sensual satisfactions of physical being, the ineffably autonomy of the other – his belated psycho-social education does lead him to the painful alternative of either denying self or society."[375] Ultimately, it leads him to the impasse both Sabbath and Humbert already face.

The masculinist doctrine represents a renunciation of convention, comfort, and sexual normativity in addition to a quest for freedom. But even if masculinism were to gain numbers and ultimately dismantle the patriarchal social structure, returning man to a pre-civilized, unsublimated state, it would still ultimately fail in its endeavor; this is because there can be no freewill, no autonomy. After all, civilization is not the only impediment to freedom.

The final obstacle to freedom Michel, Humbert and Sabbath encounter, which will be handled more thoroughly in the next chapter, is Nietzsche's eternal foe, *Time*. Of Nietzsche's resentment of the triumph of time over the (super)human will to live freely, limitlessly, Marcuse explains:

> Will is still a prisoner because it has no power over time: the past not only remains unliberated, but, unliberated, continues to mar all liberation. Unless the power of time over life is broken, there can be

[374] *Ibid.* Pg. 82-83.
[375] "The Structure of Education in Gide's *L'Immoraliste.*" Pg. 25.

> no freedom: the fact that time does not "recur" sustains the wound of bad conscience: it breeds vengeance and the need for punishment, which in turn perpetuate the past and the sickness to death.[376]

Time is non-repeating, ever-devouring. It thwarts freedom by first weakening and then obliterating the body. To this extent, time is the consummate consumer. It takes, but it does not give back. The body, the locus of pleasure and potentially freedom itself, decays, becomes the locus of pain, dies…This is why, as Humbert recognizes when he signs away his Lolita near the story's end, "One simple and stark thought stood out and this was: 'Freedom for the moment is everything.'"[377] This is why, at the start of *Sabbath's Theater* we see Sabbath "six short years from seventy" holding onto Drenka's buttocks "as though the tattooist Time had ornamented neither of them with its comical festoonery." This is why Sabbath realizes "inescapably that the game was just about over."[378]

Steven S. Curry observes that Gide, like Nietzsche, regarded time, at least at the beginning of his career, "as an obstacle, even an adversary."[379] On the one hand, Gide's hostility is predictable, obvious. After all, he, like Michel, suffers from, but ultimately overcomes, tuberculosis. He realizes the temporality of his bodily existence, even when he is initially able to outlive his ailment. Inevitable demise is itself an indication of unfreedom; the will to live cannot, and does not, ensure continuity; death cannot be 'outwilled.' In addition, time cannot be filled according to desire; it submits to reality, not pleasure. This point is made clear in Michel's lamentations over poverty and the subsequent absence of free time:

> Human poverty is an enslavement; to eat, a poor man consents to joyless labor, and all labor which is not joyous is mere drudgery, I thought. I would pay one man after another to rest, saying, 'Stop working – you hate what you're doing.' For each man I desired that leisure without which nothing new can flower – neither vice nor art.[380]

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[376] *Eros and Civilization.* Pg. 120.
[377] *Lolita.* Pg. 262.
[378] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 13.
[379] "Into the Shadow of Hesitation: Time and Identity in Gide's Middle Fiction." Pg. 233.
[380] *The Immoralist.* Pg. 157.

The destructive nature of time, the way in which it eats away at the physical self, is a limitation to freedom. But the fact that it cannot be filled according to one's inclinations, that it instead must be crammed with work or prescribed recreation, makes it significantly less endurable. Routine impedes (artistic, transgressive, and artistic *because* transgressive) creation.

Related to the imperviousness of time is the impermanence of health and virility. This ephemerality is evinced in Michel's bout with tuberculosis and subsequent valorization of health: "Significantly," MacKenzie points out, "when Michel valorizes 'health' which is also to say the healthy sexuality, of Bachir and his playmates, he does so at the expense of his relationship of his wife."[381] It is in this moment of recuperation that youth comes to stand in for virility; in this moment that pederastic desire surfaces and ultimately supplants the conjugal affection he feels at the start of their honeymoon. The fragility of health is also attested in Marceline and Lolita's miscarriages and deaths, and in Sabbath's arthritic hands, in his declining body: "This is aging, pure and simple, the self-destroying hilarity of the last roller-coaster. Sabbath meets his match: life."[382] But life only seems adversarial because it appears to expropriate, to take away, when in reality it is life that *is* expropriated and taken away. Death is the real adversary. Nietzsche tries to overcome the inevitability of death through his notion of the eternal return. In *Thus Spake Zarathustra* he surmises:

> All things pass, all things return; eternally turns the wheel of Being. All things die, all things blossom again, eternal is the year of Being. All things break, all things are joined anew; eternally the house of Being builds itself the same. All things part, all things welcome each other again; eternally the ring of Being abides by itself. In each Now, Being begins; round each Here turns the sphere of There. The center is everywhere. Bent is the past of eternity.[383]

This notion of perpetual reincarnation is perhaps a relief to some; after all, it is the promise of a return to a happiness lost. But, as we shall see, happiness is often created in memory; it, like 'play,'

[381] "The Language of Excitation in Gide's *L'Immoraliste.*" Pg. 312.
[382] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 158.
[383] Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spake Zarathustra Part III.* Tr. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Viking Press, 1954. Pg. 329-330.

belongs to the realm of fantasy. It is not real but imagined. And it is often through loss that the past is reframed, euphemized, through recollection.

Freud's early work focuses largely on the antagonism between the libidinous and self-preservation instincts. But, as Marcuse notes, at Freud's theory's later stage of development, he centers more "on the conflict between the *life instincts* (Eros) and the *death instinct* (Thanatos)."[384] The life instincts "gain ascendency over the death instincts" and continuously "counteract and delay the descent toward death."[385] Eros of course includes the sexual instincts, which can be seen as working against, though never overcoming, Thanatos.

Inasmuch as each novel is a celebration of (sensual) life, it is also an anxiety-ridden commentary on mortality. Each, in its own way, can be read as a tragedy in which the protagonist ultimately suffers because of his self-destructive adherence to pleasure. Arguably Humbert, Sabbath and Michel all sacrifice sanity for freedom and are driven to the brink of (enticing) death in their quest for immediate gratification. Joel Diggory explains, "One of tragedy's gifts is to make death itself desirable – the unsparing law of mortality becomes a beautiful necessity."[386] By the end of each novel, it is life that is unbearable and death seemingly unachievable. Sabbath, having lost everyone and everything, is left with one life to take: "And he couldn't do it. He could not fucking die. How could he leave? How could he go? Everything he hated was here."[387]

Frank Kelleter acutely observes that "the more ardently Sabbath tries to get away from living what is not life, loving what is not love, the plainer it becomes that all his liberations paradoxically originate in the source of their own impossibility – not only in the thought but in the imperative certainty of death."[388] This is perhaps why Roth perceives in an interview, "I could have called the book *Death and the Art of Dying.* […] This Sabbath is a jokester […] who winks at the genre of tragedy."[389] But the joke is rooted in melancholy, in the knowledge of both the pointlessness and

[384] *Eros and Civilization.* Pg. 22.
[385] *Ibid.* Pg. 25-26.
[386] "'Tragedy Wrought to its Uttermost': Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater* and the Art of Dying." Pg. 59.
[387] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 451.
[388] "Portrait of the Sexist as a Dying Man: Death, Ideology, and the Erotic in Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater.*" Pg. 275.
[389] "'Tragedy Wrought to its Uttermost': Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater* and the Art of Dying." Pg. 49.

ineffability of loss. After Drenka's death and after he has been kicked out of Norman's home, Sabbath can no longer find his footing. As the ground beneath him threatens to give way, he returns to the once familiar, to the familial. But the foundation on which he and his brother were raised no longer stands. The familial is not atop firm ground but six feet below loose soil. Sabbath is too late: the family to which he returns is gone. He knows there is neither literally nor metaphorically a place for him among them; but, even so, he finds it difficult to walk away. Because he cannot confront loss in speech, Sabbath relives it, returns to it: "But each time Sabbath started away from the family plot, he'd return and go back."[390] Sabbath's circling around, his retreat from and return to, the cemetery in which his family is buried evokes Nietzsche's notion of the eternal return; but Sabbath perpetually relives not a return to happiness lost, but a return to loss, and death, itself. He feels that he has been cast out of his marriage, in the realm of life, and his family plot, in the realm of death; he finds himself dispossessed and without possession. He is utterly without:

> Dispossessed. Ida had usurped his plot at the cemetery, and Christa from the gourmet shop – whose tongue Drenka had held in such high esteem and whom Rosie had waved hello to in town, just someone she knew from AA – had taken his place in his house. If this was death, then death was just life incognito. All the blessings that make this world the entertaining place that it is exist no less laughably in the nonworld, too.[391]

Existence, Sabbath realizes, is marred by the shadow of death. Eros never gains ascendency over Thanatos but is instead in a constant state of relinquishment. Life is always, if imperceptibly, succumbing, giving in, to the abyss. And as life is taken, the libido is slowly abated and eventually annihilated. To this end, Kelleter identifies death as "the strictest puritan of all, effecting a purification from carnal desires beyond repair. Sabbath faces the same dilemma: as long as there's a mortal puppeteer hiding behind the immortal ecstasy, the dancer and his phallic Maypole dance will not be able to merge in a timeless moment of complete self-presence."[392] Mortality thwarts 'complete self-presence,' freedom from the antagonism of reality and pleasure. Timelessness, *immortality,* is, like freedom itself, forever unachievable.

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[390] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 371.
[391] *Ibid.* Pg.
[392] "Portrait of the Sexist as a Dying Man: Death, Ideology, and the Erotic in Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater.*" Pg. 274.

Scheckner sees Sabbath as a consummate performer, a "true celebrant" who "always chooses life."[393] It is his gleeful nonconformity that allows him, at least temporarily, to escape the inevitability of death and decay. He notes, "*Sabbath's Theater* is both a rhapsodic and satiric statement to the effect that what in our time stands between us and total imbecility, irrationality, chaos, and spiritual decay is the determination never to set limits on one's taste for more life."[394] But, Sabbath's quest for a limitlessness life leads him to his own finitude. At the end, he, not unlike his mother, has 'no life left to take.' His felt *extra*ordinary existence cannot prevent decay and death; as Kelleter succinctly puts it, "even the most extraordinary people die of ordinary causes."[395]

Like Sabbath, Humbert realizes the futileness, but also the hilarity, of the struggle of life over death. In the Enchanted Hunters, he muses about "the parody of a hotel corridor. The parody of silence and death."[396] But nowhere, in any of the novels, is death made more absurd than when Humbert, avenging the abuses committed against Lolita in his absence, confronts his ridiculous nemesis Quilty. In what ought to be a daring show of masculinity, Humbert proves an ineffective hero. The pistol he wields holds no power; the bullets with which he 'penetrates' his 'feminine' foe fail to cause pain. The vengeance he carries out is not gallant but farcical:

> […] every time I got him with those slow, clumsy, blind bullets of mine, he would say under his breath, with a phoney British accent – all the while dreadfully twitching, shivering, smirking, but withal talking in a curiously detached and even amiable manner: 'Ah, that hurts, sir, enough! Ah, that hurts atrociously, my dear fellow. I pray you, desist. Ah – very painful, very painful indeed…God! Hah! This is abominable, you should really not-' His voice trailed off as he reached the landing, but he steadily walked on despite all the lead I had lodged in his bloated body – and in distress, in dismay, I understand that far from killing him I was injecting spurts of energy into the poor fellow, as if the bullets had been capsules wherein a heady elixir danced.[397]

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[393] Scheckner, Peter. "Roth's Falstaff: Transgressive Humor in *Sabbath's Theater.*" *The Midwest Quarterly.* Vol. 46, Iss. 3, 2005. Pg. 224.
[394] *Ibid.* Pg. 228.
[395] "Portrait of the Sexist as a Dying Man: Death, Ideology, and the Erotic in Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater."* Pg. 280.
[396] *Lolita.* Pg. 126.
[397] *Ibid.* Pg. 321.

The passage, in its absurdity, is of course meant to undermine the probability of Humbert's narrative. Under fire, one would never exaggerate injury or speak in a phoney accent. In a shootout, bullets would annihilate and not revive. The scene realizes the parody of death Humbert foresees in the hotel corridor. It is laughable, but it is also incredibly telling. The impossible confrontation reveals Humbert's internal struggle not only with his own mortality, but with his declining potency. In a moment of masculine assertion, a moment necessarily charged with testosterone and machismo, Humbert proves impotent, and his ineffectual 'bullets' fall limp.

But physical decay is perhaps most notable in Lolita, whose maturation into adulthood frames the narrative. Though Humbert's infatuation is fixed in his memory of her prepubescence, the fleetingness of her youth is stressed throughout the novel for different reasons. When Lolita enters her teen years, it is the drama teacher at Lolita's school who comments on the youth Humbert sees disappearing: "You must allow her to take part in *The Hunted Enchanters,*" she implores Humbert. "She was such a perfect little nymph in the try-out, and sometime in the spring the author will stay for a few days at Beardsley College and may attend a rehearsal or two in our new auditorium. I mean it is all part of the fun of being young and alive and beautiful."[398] Youth is fun, pleasurable, at least in part because it is the phase during which one is both beautiful and desirable. It is no wonder that youthful beauty has been the inspiration for and focus of countless works in the romantic tradition.

Brian Walter convincingly argues that *Lolita,* though a story about the extraordinariness of an artistic hero's subversion of morality (a presumably romantic theme), negates the romantic tradition in that Lolita, and her stillborn child, are irrefutably human. "The romantic ideal," he contends, "cannot survive literal physical maturation" and that "in becoming adult (physically at least), Lolita also becomes mortal."[399] He continues, "Lolita dies by maturing; by implication, Lolita represents the concurrent maturation and demise of the romantic tradition it itself child to. […] The stillbirth [which claims the lives of mother and child] serves as an emblem for a work

[398] *Ibid.* Pg. 207.

[399] Walter, Brian D. "Romantic Parody and the Ironic Muse in *Lolita*." *Essays in Literature.* Vol. 22, No. 1, 1995. Pg. 2.

that announces, by its publication, an end to the romantic tradition it inherits."[400] Lolita's physical, sexual maturation, made evident first through her menstruation and later through her impregnation, is testament to her temporality. She is not timeless, but finite, ending.

This is the physical constraint to freedom Michel perceives and tries to overcome. He remembers how, during his rehabilitation, "certain parts of myself stirred, dormant facilities which, not having functioned as yet, retained their mysterious youth."[401] He comes to covet juvenescence, and vows to fortify his body against the effects of time: "What interest could I take in myself, except as a perfectible being? This unknown perfection, vaguely as I imagined it, exalted my will as never before in my longing to achieve it; I dedicated this will utterly to fortifying my body, turning it to bronze."[402] But despite this Nietzschean effort, Michel can neither stop nor slow time. The Arab boys are older during his second trip to Biskra. Charles is older when he returns to La Morinière. And in his own body, and his nascent sexuality, he too senses decay. This discovery, Curry observes, "presents him, as such discoveries are wont to do, with a terrifying awareness of the inevitability of his own death – a mortal dread that fills him with a revulsion of the future."[403] The ever-fleeting moment, then, presents his only chance for freedom, for even bronze tarnishes with age.

Humbert, too, realizes that pleasure, and that the freedom found in pleasure, is constantly abating. When Lolita is stolen away by Quilty, we can interpret the act as her adolescence being stolen away by time. This again explains Humbert's recollection: "One simple and stark thought stood out and this was: 'Freedom for the moment is everything.'"[404] Time takes all else.

In light of the destructiveness of time, the question of freewill is definitively answered. Self-determination is unachievable so long as not just longevity, but infinitude, is rendered impossible through the passage of time. Sabbath also perceives this in his last moments with Drenka. He 'grasps' at her "as though the tattooist Time," whose 'name' Roth, like Nietzsche, capitalizes, had

[400] *Ibid.* Pg. 3.
[401] *The Immoralist.* Pg. 14.
[402] *Ibid.* Pg. 53.
[403] "Into the Shadow of Hesitation: Time and Identity in Gide's Middle Fiction." Pg. 238-239.
[404] *Lolita.* Pg. 262.

not left its indelible mark on them. He grasps knowing, "inescapably that the game was just about over."[405] Essentially, he is grasping at air.

Curry accurately (though predictably) links this enmity toward time to the myth of Narcissus. He notes, "The River of Time is fatal in two ways: first, it is fatal *to* Narcissus, because he dies in it and, second, it is fatal *for* him, because – since death is inevitable – he fulfills his destiny."[406] Although the myth is often used to convey self-absorbedness or egocentrism ('narcissism'), it also, perhaps inadvertently, depicts the longing to hold on to that which is incessantly slipping away. Narcissus dies after falling in love with his own image; but it is his inability to maintain that image that inevitably ends him.

If freedom is to be found not in the preservation of the moment, which is impossible, but in the ability to seize the moment, life itself must be put on the line to test that it is being lived at all. Hegel maintains that both self-consciousnesses are in a "life-and-death-struggle…And it is solely by risking life, that freedom is obtained."[407] Marcuse elaborates, "Freedom involves the risk of life, not because it involves liberation from servitude, but because the very content of human freedom is defined by the mutual 'negative relation' to the other."[408] Freud accounts for this propensity to risk life for freedom in his theory of Thanatos, the death instinct. Reflecting on his conjectures in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* Freud recalls:

> Starting from speculations on the beginning of life and from biological parallels, I drew the conclusion that, besides the instinct to preserve living substance and to join it into ever larger units, there must exist another, contrary instinct seeking to dissolve those units and to bring them back to their primaeval, inorganic state. That is to say, as well as Eros there was also an instinct to death.[409]

This instinct to death is especially discernable in Sabbath whose (artistic) talent lies in his reckless abandon. His, according to the book's omniscient narrator, is "the talent of a ruined man for

[405] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 13.
[406] "Into the Shadow of Hesitation: Time and Identity in Gide's Middle Fiction." Pg. 234.
[407] Hegel, Georg W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit (The Phenomenology of Mind).* (City Unknown): Pantianos Classics, 2016. Pg. 51.
[408] *Eros and Civilization.* Pg. 114.
[409] *Civilization and its Discontents.* Pg. 44.

recklessness, of a saboteur for subversion, even the talent of a lunatic – or a simulated lunatic – to overawe and horrify ordinary people."[410] Norman identifies this recklessness as part of Sabbath's anti-moral doctrine. Upon discovering his daughter's underpants in Sabbath's pocket, he accosts Sabbath: "I get your point. I get your philosophy. It's a fierce one. You're a fierce man. You've let the whole creature out, haven't you? The deeper reasonability of seeking danger is that there is, in any event, no escaping it. Pursue it or be pursued by it."[411] Sabbath confronts death by risking not only life, but also the relationships that give it meaning. Because loss is inevitable, his 'power' comes in abandoning that which he is most fearful of losing.

Patrick Hayes notes that Sabbath is a fierce free spirit modeled upon Nietzsche's "Dionysian figure" and a "tragic man" who finds "a richness of affective power" in "the pleasurable intensity of the body's erotic and aggressive energies."[412] But these energies seem to be intrinsically tied up in the hazarding of life in an unwinnable confrontation with death. Kelleter furthers, "Roth's novel can be read as the story of a man who aspired to be godlike but only came to be increasingly mortal (if such a thing is possible – but as there is death-in-life it may be said without too much reliance on metaphor that Sabbath dies many deaths in the course of his subversive liberations)."[413] But, despite these quasi-deaths Sabbath wills through his recklessness, he nevertheless evades actual death: "Despite the arthritis that disfigured his fingers, in his heart he was the puppeteer still, a lover and master of guile, artifice, and the unreal – this he hadn't yet torn out of himself. When that went, he *would* be dead."[414] Although much of the pleasure he seeks takes place on the (organic, dying) body, his 'life' is played out not in reality, but in fantasy. When he loses access to the unreal, an access gained through his fidelity to pleasure, he will ultimately lose himself.

We, too, see Humbert's engagement with Thanatos in his ineffectual shooting of Quilty. The absurdity of the scene seems to call into question the conclusiveness of death and temporality of life. Does Quilty outlive the fatal shots? Can the confrontation with death lead to the prolongation of life? Ultimately, it is Quilty who appeals to Humbert to "stop trifling with life and death," and

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[410] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 151.
[411] *Ibid.* Pg. 344.
[412] Hayes, Patrick. *Philip Roth: Fiction and Power.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pg. 83.
[413] "Portrait of the Sexist as a Dying Man: Death, Ideology, and the Erotic in Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater.*" Pg. 280.
[414] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 147.

offers to take the assassination into his own hands, casually remarking, "I know all the ropes. Let me handle this."[415] But Humbert does eventually, miraculously, manage to kill Quilty. This extreme act of defiance, this not only risking but taking of life, is what lands Humbert in jail and at the mercy of the authoritative, 'no-saying' figure of punitive morality. The imagined cage of unfreedom materializes in the unmovable bars of a tangible, *real* reformatory.

At the beginning of *The Immoralist,* Michel muses "the capacity to get free is nothing; the capacity to be free, that is the task."[416] To be free, one must abandon entirely 'normal' earthly and social considerations. They must cease to care – about whether they live or die, about the effects of life or death on others, and, most importantly, about their own conformity or dissidence. They must be indifferent to the voice of the authoritative father and virtuous mother; they must abnegate religion and social convention. They must be not only individualistic, but utterly, irreversibly alone. They must not confuse lust for love or sex for anything more than a moment's pleasure.

Sabbath cannot break free, as he is attached to a past peopled with those he has lost. The acquisition of Morty's belongings plants him in a moment that cannot be relived, yet the memories stored in his brother's possessions sustains him, even when he wants most to die: "How could he kill himself now that he had Morty's things? Something always came along to make you keep living, god-dammit!"[417]

Michel, too, faces this quandary. He is on the one hand liberated, but on the other bound to unfreedom through the realization of his conscience, the internalization of the values he tries to extirpate and dismiss: "Tear me away from this place," he implores his three friends, "give me some reason to live. I myself no longer know where to look. I may have liberated myself, but what does it matter? This useless freedom tortures me. It's not – believe me, it's not that I'm tired of my crime, if that's what you want to call it; but I must prove to myself that I have not exceeded my rights." [418] Despite his perceived freedom, he seeks approbation; he needs the assurance that,

[415] *Lolita.* Pg. 316.
[416] *The Immoralist.* Pg. 7.
[417] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 415.
[418] *The Immoralist.* Pg. 169.

notwithstanding his 'crime,' he is still *good.* This need for acceptance determines Michel's experiment, renders his freedom unattainable.

Though Michel, Humbert and Sabbath all flout the rules of convention and grasp at pleasure in a collective 'thumbing of the nose' at morality, none is able to 'be' free. Each is bound, if not by the memory of loss, the shackles of punitive justice, or the desire for exoneration, then by the inevitability of the death that cannot be outwilled or overcome. Time always wins.

Perhaps, then, it is not freedom in the moment that is most important. Perhaps life, especially artistic life, is best lived in the fantasy realm of recovered memories. Perhaps that is where desire, happiness and even time itself converge and create new meanings and realities. Each novel is written as part recollection, part confession, and part fabrication; in this, each novel is about more than masculinism as mode, movement, rebellion or doctrine. In this, each novel is about masculinism as a desire to recover predicated on loss.

DESIRE: RECOVERING THE LOST OBJECT

It seems obvious, even redundant, to say that masculinism is somehow preoccupied with desire. After all, we have already discussed the extent to which it is caught up in notions of authenticity through transgression, the polymorphous perverse, and (sexual) freedom. It seems only natural, based on these themes, that the masculinist quest be rooted in a physical, insatiable want. But desire seldom stems from a mere longing for sexual or sensual gratification. Indeed, it need not be, and arguably is not, sexual at all. Instead, desire, we shall see, is predicated on an absence – a want of something, or someone, missing, or felt, or lost. The sexual simply tries to replace or account for desire, to fill the space of the perpetual, inescapable void of desideration. But sex is only an act, a performance; it cannot recover; it can only momentarily evoke. Rather than holding on as sex is perhaps in some way meant to, it is always letting go. It is releasing. We saw this release emblematized through orgasm, ejaculation, in the last chapter. In this, sex is essentially an act of abjection; it 'casts off.' The connection sex, or even intimacy, establishes, and the pleasure it affords, is therefore evanescent. But desire, even as it seems to subside, endures.

Desire, because it is so often confused with sexual longing, is doomed to be misunderstood. This is especially true within this masculinist framework, in which (sexual) pleasure is seen as a potential gateway to freedom. But freedom, like the satiation of desire, remains elusive - ever out-of-reach. The masculinist condition is then marked as much by a deep dissatisfaction (with failed autonomy, the temporality of pleasure) as by the constant, reckless pursuit of sexual gratification. At the heart of this dissatisfaction, this lack of autonomy and brevity of pleasure, is of course the consummate antagonist of the masculinist man: time.

In the previous chapter, time - even more so than civilization - was shown to be the inevitable thwarter of freedom, destroyer of pleasure. It was shown to be that which chips away, at the ever-deteriorating body, of course, but also at the mind, the memory; at that which some might call the soul, but which I prefer to identify as the cognizance. Significant, though, is not what we name that which is taken, but the recognition that time *takes,* and takes indiscriminately, and that time, the consummate conqueror, itself cannot (yet) be conquered.

Time is that which stands in the way of an unobstructed existence; in this way, it is weighty, real, irrefutable. It *is.* But what is it *exactly*? Some, including Aristotle, Hegel, and (notably) Nietzsche, see it as a closed circle, as a being-as-end-in-itself, as endlessness…of Nietzsche's discernment of time as eternal, Herbert Marcuse explains:

> Eternity, long since the ultimate consolation of an alienated existence, has been made into an instrument of repression by its relegation to a transcendental world – unreal reward for real suffering. Here, eternity is reclaimed for the fair earth – as the eternal return of its children, of the lily and the rose, of the sun and the mountains and lakes, of the lover and the beloved, of the fear for their life, of pain and happiness. Death *is*; it is conquered only if it is followed by the real rebirth of everything that was before death here on earth – not as a repetition but as a willed and wanted recreation. The eternal return thus includes the return of suffering, but suffering as a means for more gratification, for the aggrandizement of joy.[419]

Here, eternity, the infinitude of time, is severed from religion, from the 'transcendental world,' from fantasy, insofar fantasy equates imagination or that which is *unreal, idealized,* insofar it equates 'the kingdom of God.' Eternity is instead the *willed and wanted* recreation of *real* pain and suffering as a means to reconjure remembered gratification *on earth*. But this rendition of time is erroneous, illusory: because the will to return to suffering for the sake of heightened pleasure takes place over the course of a single existence, an existence in a constant, irrevocable state of progression and decay, it can never be recreated. Perhaps Nietzsche intended his eternal return as a theoretical, rather than definite, construct, as a means to anchor the abstract in the concrete. But, for Michel, Humbert, and Sabbath, his postulate that eternity can be willfully recreated on earth is taken at face-value. It is integral to and inseparable from their masculinist endeavor to outlive time and their human venture to recover what time has taken away. This is not to imply that they believe in the eternal return, *per se*, or that they think they have a shot at retrieving, or reviving, that which has been lost. It is to say that they see the realization of this return as their only hope; in this regard, they are not so different from the consummately devout after all. In this regard, masculinism, as a standpoint, is not so different from a religion or even a *morality...*

[419] Marcuse, Herbert. *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1955. Pg. 122.

At the risk of projecting Nietzsche's philosophy onto the three literary characters, onto textual constructs, names without *actual* referents, I would argue that Michel, Humbert, and Sabbath grapple with time in ways that reflect Nietzsche's own ambivalent articulations of it. For although Nietzsche perceives time as both cyclical and eternal, he also recognizes the implicit finitude of death. This is what is so difficult to reconcile: the end in the endlessness. It is no accident that Nietzsche intimates this incongruity not through the voice of reason, but through that of madness. In *Thus Spake Zarathurstra,* it is madness who preaches: "'All things pass away, therefore all things deserve to pass away! And thus is justice itself, this law of Time, that it must devour its own children.'"[420] The loss associated with the chipping away of time and passing away of 'things' is multifaceted. On the one hand, it is the annihilation of self: it is Michel's near fatal bout with tuberculosis, Humbert's sexual impotence, Sabbath's arthritic hands. On the other, however, it is the appearance and dissipation of specters, the 'things' whose essences are ensconced in those who remember them, but whose physicality, whose presence, has been lost to time. It is the maturation of the Arab boys, Lolita's devastating miscarriage, the death of Drenka, the fleetingness of (physical) human connection. For inasmuch as time takes away, it also leaves behind.

It can be convincingly argued that each work, *The Immoralist, Lolita,* and *Sabbath's Theater,* aims to articulate what is left in the aftermath of death, in the face of unfreedom, and in the seemingly ineffability of loss; in short, that each aims to articulate *desire.* Relying primarily on the theoretical constructs of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan and Catherine Belsey, this chapter will detail a masculinist desire predicated on loss, on that which time takes away and leaves behind. This absence will be evidenced as an unnamable abyss or void; as that which can be neither (re)filled nor revived. It, like the philosophical notion of time that produces it, will be shown to be irreconcilable in itself, unequivocally problematic. This is because it is, on the one hand, nothing: something that was but no longer is. But, on the other hand, it (re)emerges as a lost object, Lacan's *objet petit a,* something that does not cease to be simply because it is no longer here, because it is no longer nameable, tangible.

Desire is, then, hardly limited to feelings of love or lust or yearning, as one might assume, but is rather rooted in a want of recovery, in a want to take back what has been taken away. In this regard,

[420] Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spake Zarathustra, Part II.* Tr. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Viking Press, 1954. Pg. 25.

desire is a want that cannot be met. The first chapter connected masculinism to aestheticism; here, aestheticism will be further detailed as the literary apparatus masculinism employs in its (futile) efforts to recover the 'lost object' through (often written) recollection and confession. Of the confesser, Foucault notes, "It is no longer a question simply of saying what was done – the sexual act – and how it was done; but of reconstructing, in and around the act, the thoughts that recapitulated it, the obsessions that accompanied it, the images, desires, modulations, and quality of the pleasure that animated it."[421] This is particularly true of Michel and Humbert, who, unlike Sabbath, aestheticize their sexual experiences by intimating at rather than detailing them. While it can be assumed that Michel, somewhere in or beyond the narrative's pages, has a homosexual, 'pederastic' encounter, he omits extramarital intercourse (or even intimacy) from his confession. Likewise, Humbert focuses on his obsession with nymphets rather than his (continual) defilement of Lolita, asserting, "I am not concerned with so-called 'sex' at all. Anybody can imagine those elements of animality. A greater endeavor lures me on: to fix once and for all the perilous magic of nymphets."[422] Confession, in this context, is less a means to atone than to recreate and preserve. The sexual act is detached from reality and reimagined in fantasy; it exists as an idealized recollection of 'obsessions,' 'images,' desires,' 'modulations,' and, of course, 'pleasure.' As Marcuse notes, the "aesthetic state" is the only potential for a "state of freedom" – the only means to "defeat the destructive course of time."[423]

In her illuminative work on melancholy, *Black Sun,* Julia Kristeva explains that through processes of idealization (of which memoir/confession is an obvious example) a 'hypersign' can be woven around and with the depressive void, the embodiment of loss or absence, to revitalize what time has 'devoured.' "This," she contends, "is *allegory,* as *lavishness* of that which *no longer is* […] beauty emerges as the admirable face of loss, transforming it in order to make it live."[424] This aesthetic approach turns lost people (*lost objects*) into textual realities; they live through the words that (re)create them on the page. Joel Diggory notes that Kristeva's 'hypersign,' the linguistic representation of absence, is "a form of signification founded on the unrepresentabilty of loss but

[421] Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: Vol. I, An Introduction.* Tr. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1978. Pg. 63.
[422] Nabokov, Vladimir. *Lolita.* New York: Everyman's Library, 1992. Pg. 142.
[423] *Eros and Civilization.* Pg. 122.
[424] Kristeva, Julia. *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia.* Tr. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989. Pg. 99.

which takes absence into its own essence - that sublimates the human's primordial sense of loss into an aesthetic artifact."[425] The lost object is then theoretically recovered not through rebirth, but through stylization. In *Metaphors of Memory: A History of Ideas about the Mind*, Douwe Draasima muses, "In writing, a version of experience is set down, a representation, the result of sifting and perspective. What has been written is not interchangeable with what has been experienced."[426] The recovery through stylization, then, does not satiate the desire for what was real not in words, but *on earth.*

This is why, in addition to aestheticizing what has been lost, masculinism also attempts to revive it through reincarnation. This is the repetition of desire, the continued replacement of the original lost object via approximation, via a resembling object. Masculinism can then be seen as an artistic endeavor to make what is remembered not only real but immortal, to recreate both in writing and, as far as literature will allow, in the flesh; this endeavor is of course tangent to the quest for freedom, to the effort to defeat, to *stop*, time. This venture is not the result but the manifestation of desire. For it is desire that obstinately aims to fill the unfillable void by way of aestheticism or reincarnation. But what is desire *exactly*? Lacan posits:

> Desire is produced in the beyond of demand, in that, in articulating the life of the subject according to its conditions, demand cuts off the need from that life. But desire is also hollowed within the demand, in that, as an unconditional demand of presence and absence, demand evokes the want-to-be under the three figures of the nothing that constitutes the basis for demand for love, of the hate that even denies the others' being, and of the unspeakable element in which that is ignored in its request. In this embodied aporia, of which one might say that it borrows, as it were, its heavy soul from the hardy shoots of the wounded drive, and its subtle body from the death actualized in the signifying sequence, desire is confirmed as the absolute condition.[427]

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[425] Diggory, Joel. "'Tragedy Wrought to its Uttermost': Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater* and The Art of Dying." *Philip Roth Studies.* Vol. 12, No. 2, 2016. Pg. 59-60.
[426] Douwe, Draasima. *Metaphors of Memory: A History of Ideas about the Mind.* Tr. Paul Vincent. Cambride: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Pg. 45.
[427] Lacan, Jacques. "The Direction of the Treatment of the Principles of Power." *Ecrits.* Tr. Alan Sheridan. London: Tavistock, 1977. Pg. 265.

So, desire, like notions of time and loss, is contradictory, irresolvable. It is the presence of an 'absolute condition hollowed in 'demand' - in lack, absence, *loss.* It is the demand for (unrealizable) love, for retribution, for its [desire's] own unfulfillment. It is the inevitable perpetuity of demand that makes desire, the constant state of want (to recover, to return) – the absolute condition.

In "Memory, Consciousness and Time in Nabokov's *Lolita,"* Olga Hasty differentiates between 'protracted' and 'repetitive' desire, which she appropriately links to the myth of Orpheus and the legend of Don Juan, respectively. Although she uses Orpheus and Don Juan to detail Humbert's deviant desire, the correlations she draws, and the inferences she makes, can just as easily be applied to both Michel and Sabbath.

In Greek mythology, Orpheus is a prodigious musician who learns to play the lyre under the tutelage of the god Apollo. Apart from his musical talent, Orpheus is renowned for his 'undying' love for his wife, Eurydice. When shortly into their marriage Eurydice is killed in a pit of vipers (as is wont to happen in such myths), Orpheus composes and performs a somber selection of lamentations in which he mournfully proclaims his eternal devotion to his wife. Moved by the melancholic melodies, the gods encourage Orpheus to journey to the underworld and implore Hades to release his wife. Hades concedes but warns Orpheus not to look back. Unable to determine if Eurydice is behind him, Orpheus glances back just as he is about to exit the underworld. He glimpses his wife, whom Hades subsequently pulls back into the abyss. Orpheus never tries to overcome his grief or to replace his wife with another. Instead his desire, marked by her absence, by *loss,* is protracted; it endures. Hasty explains:

> In her [Eurydice's] absence his [Orpheus's] desire is sustained by creative gestures that both fuel and are, in turn, fueled by that desire. Duration prolongs a particular event, but it also resists closure and new experience, which would interrupt that which is being prolonged. Thus after his beloved's death, Orpheus rejects all other women so that his desire might be protracted. The price exacted for such sustenance is high: duration predicated on the absence of the desired object precludes fulfillment.[428]

[428] Hasty, Olga. "Memory, Consciousness and Time in Nabokov's *Lolita.*" Kronoscope. Vol. 4, Iss. 2, 2004. Pg. 232.

This desire endures not in spite of but because of its disruption. Death protracts the desire for that which is gone, for desire does not die with the lost object. We see this protraction of desire in the ghost of Sabbath's mother, in his memories of Morty and Drenka, and the ineffable 'endlessness' that preceded their dissipation in and to time. It is equally apparent in Humbert's lifelong obsession not with Lolita, but with her predecessor, Annabel. Orpheus, then, embodies he who refuses to let go even when there is nothing, no one, left to hold onto.

In contrast to Orpheus, Don Juan exemplifies libertinism. His name, synonymous with womanizing, has been used in countless texts and across countless genres, cultures and languages. For Don Juan, desire does not endure, but ceases and repeats. He recurrently replaces one object of desire with another. Unlike Orpheus, he neither falls nor believes in love. Instead, it is pleasure he seeks and seeks to replace. This pattern of replacing one object of desire with another is particularly pronounced in Michel's various encounters with the Arab boys. Different from Humbert and Sabbath, he latches on to a type rather than an individual. His affection for boys like Moktir is predicated on their health, vitality and youth, on a condition that is constantly receding, slipping away. He replaces not so much them as the idea of them. They are both symbolic and actual objects, one-dimensional characters without subjectivity. It is no wonder that Michel can so easily retract his (implicitly sexual) feelings for them.

Hasty ultimately links this repetition of desire to the memory of other formative experiences, delineating it as a reconfiguration rather than duplication of the past:

> The availability of a particular event to memory grants that event the potential for duration in repeated recollections. The event is thus neither lost to passage nor subjected to the protraction that threatens to absorb both its particularity and its evanescence. At the same time, memory's distinctively anti-linear dynamic means that each event does not simply give way to successive ones, but can instead be engaged in ever-new configurations. The fertile combination of repetition and the novelty of that memory thus forestalls the conscious-dulling effects of mere repetition and mere succession.[429]

[429] "Memory, Consciousness and Time in Nabokov's *Lolita.*" Pg. 235.

Repetition recreates, but, through memory, it also creates anew. In her inquiry into *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture,* Catherine Belsey elaborates on the repetition of desire by explicitly connecting it to Lacan's lost object: "Every object of desire stands in for an original object which is forever lost, and which it represents."[430] This means every object of desire fills the position of something it is not; in this regard, it is bound to fall short, to disappoint. In *Life and Death,* Jean Laplanche details the object of desire's inability to replicate the initial lost object, noting of the object of adult desire:

> Is not the lost object, but its substitute by displacement; the lost object is the object of self-preservation, of hunger, and the object one seeks to refind in sexuality is an object displaced in relation to that first object. From this, of course, arises the impossibility of ultimately ever recovering the object, since the object which has been lost *is not the same* as that which is to be rediscovered.[431]

This compulsion to reincarnate is, at least in part, why Michel, Humbert, and Sabbath are incapable of securing lasting sexual relationships; each object of desire sheds its desirability once it evolves away from the lost object it is meant to signify. The repetition of desire is nowhere more obvious than in Humbert's manic recollections of not only the novel's namesake, Lolita, but of his first object of desire, *objet petit a*, Annabel. He admits, "In point of fact, there might have been no Lolita at all had I not loved, one summer, a certain initial girl-child. In a princedom by the sea."[432] Detailing his childhood romance with Annabel, Humbert laments that they were "unable even to mate as slum children would have so easily to do."[433] He recalls the proximity to the elders that prevented them from enjoying more than quick, stolen kisses:

> There, on the soft sand, a few feet from our elders, we would sprawl all morning, in a petrified paroxysm of desire, and take advantage of every blessed quirk in space and time to touch each other […] these incomplete contacts drove our healthy and inexperienced young bodies to such a state of exasperation that not even the cold blue water, under which we clawed at each other, could bring relief.

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[430] Belsey, Catherine. *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994. Pg. 50.
[431] Laplanche, Jean. *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis.* Tr. Jeffrey Mehlman. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976. Pg. 20.
[432] *Lolita.* Pg. 9.
[433] *Ibid*. Pg. 12.

Further exciting Humbert's imagination is the snapshot he finds of a small group, including Annabel and himself, at a sidewalk café. But Annabel seems no more preserved in the image than in Humbert's nebulous recollections. Instead, it is Humbert whose dress and countenance remain intact:

> Annabel did not come out well, caught as she was in the act of bending over her *chocolat glacé,* and her thin bare shoulders and parting in her hair were about all that could be identified (as I remember that picture) amid the sunny blur into which her lost loveliness graded; but I, sitting somewhat apart from the rest, came out with a kind of dramatic conspicuousness: a moody, beetle-browed boy in a dark sport shirt and well-tailored white shorts, his legs crossed, sitting in profile, looking away.[434]

The photograph leads Humbert back to the moment in which he, the moody adolescent, nearly possessed his lost object: "I was on my knees, and on the point of possessing my darling, when two bearded bathers, the old man of the sea and his brother, came out of the sea with exclamations of ribald encouragement, and four months later she died of typhus in Corfu."[435] These passages, so often glossed over, represent the inception of Humbert's desire and dissidence as well as the inception of Lolita herself. It has been intimated that Annabel is the lost object Humbert comes to want to duplicate and replace. But what about his experience, 'one summer,' leads him to protract his desire for a *child* whose face, which he now only sees in "general terms,"[436] he has all but forgotten? Perhaps the answer lies not in Annabel, but in Humbert himself.

What prevents him from acting out his desire? First, it is prescriptive morality, the internalization of unfreedom. For had he and Annabel not been surveilled, watched over by the discerning eyes of the upper echelon, 'the elders,' they would have been 'able to mate like [immoral] slum children,' to experience precipitate and unencumbered gratification. Then, it is circumstance. The interruption by the bearded bathers who, unlike the elders, crudely encourage Hubert and Annabel to consummate their affair, thus degrading the significance of the act itself. But there is more at play than mere *coitus interruptus*, and there is more at play than internalized morality.

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[434] *Ibid.* Pg. 12-13.
[435] *Ibid.*
[436] *Ibid.* Pg. 12.

Alfred Appel contends that Humbert "cherishes his worn old snapshot of Annabel Leigh, his lost nymphet, and in a sense lives and dies by that 'nebulous picture.' By trying to make Lolita conform to it, he reduces her to an image that is dead in every sense of the word."[437] But in that snapshot, Annabel is hardly identifiable apart from her parted hair and thin bare shoulders. Her loveliness, already in the photograph, is grading, diminishing. It is Humbert whose brooding countenance and apparent detachment stand out. The lost object *is* Annabel; she is after all the one Humbert perpetually tries to recreate. But perhaps it is also the loss of self that so consumes him.

After Lolita has been taken by Quilty, Humbert naturally searches for her; but he also searches for his own visage. He seeks out "retrievable time" in the town library, between the pages of the *Briceland Gazette*: "What *I* lusted to get," he confesses to his 'Reader! *Bruder*!', "was the printed picture that had chanced to absorb my trespassing image while the *Gazette's* photographer was concentrating on Dr. Braddock and his group. Passionately I hoped to find preserved the portrait of the artist of a younger brute."[438] Arguably, there are traces of Michel's narcissism in Humbert's desire to harness time and relive his summer with Annabel, whether through Lolita or those who preceded her…or even through those he envisions quite literally creating *with* her.

Perhaps Humbert's story would have ended differently had he and Annabel not been obstructed by unfreedom or had they not been interrupted by the boorish remarks of the bathers. Perhaps the consummation of the act would have rendered the act, and his love for Annabel, normal, even mundane. Maybe then Humbert, too, would have been ordinary, his predilections conventional. Or perhaps his story would have ended differently had Annabel lived past the age he comes to fetishize. Perhaps it is her death that not only enables but incepts the protraction of Humbert's desire for her. Perhaps Annabel remains an object of (protracted) desire because she dies young and never grows up. Hasty explains the complicatedness of Humbert's plight to both prolong and repeat his impracticable desire:

> Even if Annabel were not dead, she would no longer be the same 'fey child' who entranced him. Humbert is at an impasse: Because

[437] Appel, Alfred. *Nabokov's Dark Cinema.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1974. Pg. 69.
[438] *Lolita.* Pg. 278.

> his first love is both defined and sustained by unfulfilled desire, it must remain unsatisfied if it is to be preserved. The satisfaction of his desire with a child onto whom Annabel is projected can only eliminate the distinctive feature of the relationship he wishes to recapture. The obsessive iteration of the sex act to which Humbert resorts with Lolita can only underscore the unrepeatability of Annabel.[439]

Perhaps, then, had Annabel lived, the 'distinctive feature' of their relationship would have also evolved, grown up, and eventually dissipated; perhaps the dissipation would have left nothing to be replaced, repeated. But such speculation leads nowhere. We know only that losing Annabel proves insurmountable for Humbert and that interwoven in her signification as the lost object is Humbert's own hopeless past; there is a part of himself that perishes with her and which is now barely traceable in faded photographs and illicit acts. For, inasmuch as *Lolita* is about Lolita, it is also the failed replacement of Annabel and, quite frankly, the failed replacement of self. Humbert ages, deteriorates, even though his desire does not. It is no wonder he often encounters himself when in search of the lost object:

> I could list a great number of these one-sided diminutive romances. Some of them ended in a rich flavor of hell. It happened for instance that from my balcony I would notice a lighted window across the street and what looked like a nymphet in the act of undressing before a co-operative mirror. Thus isolated, thus removed, the vision acquired an especially keen charm that made me race with all speed toward my lone gratification. But abruptly, fiendishly, the tender pattern of nudity I had adored would be transformed into the disgusting lamp-lit bare arm of a man in his underclothes reading his paper by the window in the hot, damp, hopeless summer night.[440]

This transposition of object of desire and self, for the man described is, or could be, a reflection of Humbert, is significant. It shows his very identity as caught up in that of Annabel; although their union is never realized, that fatal summer somehow brings them together as an inseparable unit. They are both abstractions, signifiers whose referents have been lost to time. It is as if Humbert has grown apart from himself, a vision isolated and removed, from the brooding boy he once was.

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[439] "Memory, Consciousness and Time in Nabokov's *Lolita.*" Pg. 230-231.
[440] *Lolita.* Pg. 22.

The succession of nymphets is then an act of self-recovery. This postulate clarifies (but of course does not defend) the most abhorrent of his musings, namely: whether to reproduce Lolita *with* Lolita. As Lolita reaches puberty, he begins to calculate not only what to do with her, this increasingly rebellious woman-child to whom he is now a father, but what to do about her replacement. In a torrential, *maniacal*, single sentence, he muses:

> I now think it was a great mistake to move east again and have her [Lolita] go to that private school in Beardsley, instead of somehow scrambling across the Mexican border while the scrambling was good so as to lie low for a couple of years in subtropical bliss until I could safely marry my little Creole for I must confess that depending on the condition of my glands and ganglia, I could switch in the course of the same day from one pole of insanity to the other – from the thought that around 1950 I would have to get rid of somehow of a difficult adolescent whose magic nymphage had evaporated – to the thought that with patience and luck I might have her produce eventually a nymphet with my blood in her exquisite veins, a Lolita the Second, who would be eight or nine around 1960, when I would still be *dans la force de l'âge*; indeed, the telescopy of my mind, or un-mind, was strong enough to distinguish in the remoteness of time a *vieillard encore vert* – or was it green rot? – bizarre, tender, salivating Dr. Humbert, practicing on supremely lovely Lolita the Third the art of being a granddad.[441]

Here he reaches the impossibility of his condition, the insatiability of his desire. The border indicates morality's periphery and delineates between obstructed and unimpeded (sexual) freedom. Humbert recognizes that crossing the border would allow him to flout, or leave behind, the conventions prohibiting his deviant desire for Lolita and her imagined successors. With the garbled loquacity of a self-proclaimed madman, he conceives the violation of his own progeny. In this, he accounts for his succession of Lolitas aging out of desirability, becoming (to put it bluntly) repellent, untouchable. What he fails to account for, however, is his own physical regression. Instead, he imagines himself: a 'force of age,' a man 'in his prime,' someone who has retained his prowess even as his second and third Lolitas reach nymphancy. Only when he interrupts himself to ask whether the ripeness he envisions preserving is not actually the onset of rot, does he seem to acknowledge the temporality, if not of his illicit urges, then of his ability to fulfill them.

[441] *Lolita.* Pg. 184.

Yet Humbert is still lucid; his delusions do not impede his comprehension of what he does or who he has become. Contending with his conscience, the part of himself cognizant of his transgressions and the mark they will leave on Lolita, Humbert struggles to rectify his need to act out his impulses on her with the awareness that she is but a replacement of the lost object, Annabel. To combat his intermittent sense of guilt, Humbert turns to aestheticization. He draws literary connections between Lolita and the child mistresses of Poe and Dante to evidence the eternal artistry of his desire. "Oh Lolita," he cries out, "you are my girl, as Vee was Poe's and Bea Dante's […]."[442] His, he intimates, is no ordinary infatuation. Philipp Schweighauser rightly remarks:

> Lolita's body is […] turned into a body of allusions, into a fragmented and incoherent *assemblage* of references which she herself would not understand. It is Humbert who assimilates her to his own cultural knowledge; he does not only deny her the life of an ordinary twelve-year-old, but he completely obliterates *this* Lolita in order to reinstate *his* Lolita in her place.[443]

He devests her of her personhood that he might render her, like Vee or Bea, an idealized, *textualized*, representation of desire. Schweighauser asserts that "his aesthetic project of immortalizing Lolita is thus deeply embedded in a discourse which denies nymphets a human life and reduces them to a stasis ("Never grow up") that is more akin to death than to life."[444] Unlike Michel, who fails to perceive his paramours as autonomous or even actual (for him, they *are* objects), Humbert deems his nymphets as *both* real and apparitional, enchanted. In this, they are more like J.M. Barrie's lost boys than Gide's Arab ones. When he implores to be left alone "in my pubescent park, in my mossy garden. Let them play around me forever. Never grow up,"[445] he is asking for Neverland, the mystical realm in which time stands still and children remain children. But because the realm he seeks is unreachable, he preserves his nymphets not through magic or pixie dust, but through memory. He publishes an essay titled 'Memir and Memory,' in which:

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[442] *Lolita.* Pg. 113.
[443] Schweighauser, Phillipp. "Discursive Killings: Intertextuality, Aestheticism, and Death in Nabokov's 'Lolita.'" *Amerikastudien / American Studies.* Vol. 44, No. 2, 1999. Pg. 260.
[444] *Ibid.* Pg. 266.
[445] *Lolita.* Pg. 21.

> I suggested among other things that seemed original and important to that splendid review's benevolent readers, a theory of perceptual time based on the circulation of the blood and conceptually depending (to fill up this nutshell) on the mind's being conscious not only of matter but also of its own self, thus creating a continuous spanning of two points (the storable future and the stored past).[446]

But memory is precarious, unstable. And it is therefore impossible to store the past, as the memory thereof is in a state of constant fluctuation. This is why Humbert chastises himself for not recording Lolita when he had the chance: "Idiot, triple idiot! I could have filmed her! I would have had her now with me, before my eyes, in the projection room of my pain and despair!"[447] Even the memoir he pens after Lolita's death does little to preserve their relationship or recreate the one he had with Annabel; after all, memoir, because based on unreliable memory, inevitably fails as a kind of (auto)biography and instead becomes a work of fiction. In this, it always falls short of its purpose. Daniel Albright observes that "our remembered selves are everywhere informed by and dependent on literary concoctions, and it is impossible to be certain of the exact boundaries of our affective systems – just where our own end and literary pseudomemories begin."[448] Because our true memories blend with our 'pseudomemories,' the past can never be retrieved as it was. Instead, it is dynamic; it evolves. Our remembered selves are always partially forgotten, partially imaginary, never intact. Foucault muses that "we have passed from a pleasure to be recounted and heard…to a literature ordered according to the infinite task of extracting from the depths of oneself, in between the words, a truth which the very form of confession [or memoir] holds out like a shimmering mirage."[449] The simile is appropriate in that it reinforces the unattainability and vagary of the past, the truth of which is lost in a web of allusion, desire and despair. Confession, and subsequently memoir, is invariably a misrepresentation of what was.

Despite Humbert's recognition that words create new worlds rather than wholly conjuring old ones, he sees memoir as a last chance of both recovery and resolution. While he admits his account of Lolita lacking, he nevertheless pursues his project to revive her through recollection:

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[446] *Ibid.* Pg. 276.
[447] *Ibid.* Pg. 245.
[448] Albright, Daniel. "Literary and Psychological Models of the Self." *The Remembering Self: Construction and Accuracy in the Self-narrative.* Eds. Ulric Neisser and Robyn Fivush. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Pg. 33.
[449] *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I, An Introduction.* Pg. 59.

> Only in the tritest of terms (diary resumed) can I describe Lo's features: I might say her hair is auburn, and her lips as red as licked red candy, the lower one prettily plump – oh, that I were a lady writer who could have her pose naked in a naked light! But instead I am lanky, big-boned, wooly-chested Humbert Humbert, with thick black eyebrows and a queer accent, and a cesspool of rotting monsters behind my boyish smile.[450]

He recounts what he can of Lolita knowing the irretrievability of that which has been lost. But his recollections are also indicative of a desire for self-discovery; he wants to articulate and thus solve the root of his own consummate obsession. Through retrospection, he attempts to wrap his head around that which proved baffling in real time: the inextricable power of the nymphet. He reasons:

> What drives me insane is the two-fold nature of this nymphet – of every nymphet, perhaps; this mixture in my Lolita of tender dreamy childishness and a kind of eerie vulgarity, stemming from the snub-nosed cuteness of ads and magazine pictures, from the blurry pinkness of adolescent maidservants in the Old Country (smelling of crushed daisies and sweat); and from very young harlots disguised as children in provincial brothels; and then again, all this gets mixed up with the exquisite stainless tenderness seeping through the musk and the mud, through the dirt and the death, oh God, of God. And what is most singular is that she, *this* Lolita, *my* Lolita, has individualized the writer's ancient lust, so that above and over everything else there is – Lolita.[451]

Lolita, as any nymphet, is an amalgamation of contradictions. While her youth renders her innocent, infallible, she is also on the verge of adulteration, debasement. She is playful yet cunning; 'stainless' yet coy, teasing. She is the embodiment of youth and the warning of death. She *is* a 'crushed daisy,' a wilting flower. Putting the paradoxical nature of his nymphet into words allows him to evoke the past (altered though it becomes) and to work through his own desire. Recalling her shows that his lust, though 'ancient' (primal and therefore universal), is also individualized, exceptional. When he speaks of *'this* Lolita, *my* Lolita,' Humbert does not mean the flesh and blood Lolita that once was; he means the beguiling contradiction he has put in writing. It is through

[450] *Lolita.* Pg. 46.
[451] *Ibid.* Pg. 46-47.

his craft that the writer's desire is aestheticized and made remarkable, even heroic. In this way, memoir attempts to pin down desire, to fill the unfillable void. But even as his words grapple to retrieve and revive, they end up pointing to, stressing, that which no longer is: not *this* Lolita, but *that* Lolita.

Hasty notes that the "powerful link between time and consciousness is predicated on Nabokov's awareness that the creation of memories that forestall loss depends on that very passage that poses the threat of loss to begin with."[452] Time takes, devours. And what is left is a desire based on loss. It is consciousness that fills the void until it too is chipped away at, diminished, by time. The fading, the distorting, of memory is time's final blow. Brian D. Walter trenchantly perceives that *Lolita* foregrounds Humbert "as the confined and dying memoirist, placing his relations with Lolita in a completed (and highly stylized) past; thus, in an important sense, the main action of the novel consists not of the events of Humbert's biography, but of his recording of it."[453] To this end, *Lolita* is not only a book about cruelty, or art, or even artifice, but also a book about trying to first hold onto and then to recover the lost object. Or, as Hasty succinctly notes, "*Lolita* is a novel about memory and loss."[454]

The Immoralist is equally rooted in an irretrievable, and thus irrevocable, past. In fact, it too is framed as a recollection. What complicates the narrative, however, is that it is a retelling not by Michel, but by one of the 'dear friends' to whom he verbally recounts his story. But despite the multifold potential for the past to be distorted, the written letter recapitulating Michel's confession is strikingly cogent. It seems reliable as both a first- and third-person narrative. Michel's wish to truthfully detail the experiment with freedom that ultimately leads to Marceline's death *seems* a means to atone, and such expiation cannot be achieved through deception. Above all, Michel wishes to speak out, to be heard. He explains to his friends:

> For if I summoned you abruptly and made you travel to the out-of-the-way place where I live, it was solely that I might see you, that you might hear me. That is all the help I need: to speak to you. For

[452] "Memory, Consciousness and Time in Nabokov's *Lolita."* Pg. 227.
[453] Walter, Brian D. "Romantic Parody and the Ironic Muse in *Lolita.*" *Essays in Literature.* Vol. 22, No. 1, 1995. Pg. 4.
[454] "Memory, Consciousness and Time in Nabokov's *Lolita."* Pg. 228.

> I am at a moment in my life past which I can no longer see my way. Yet this is not exhaustion. The point is, I no longer understand. I need…I need to speak, I tell you.[455]

There would be no purpose in willfully distorting the tale he tells because his self-incrimination is not aimed to exonerate but to illuminate. Having failed to be free, Michel now seeks understanding; he wants to know his own motives, to analyze his own existence. He aims, to borrow some of Foucault's phrasing, to reconstruct the past, including the obsessions and pleasures that animated it. This endeavor demands honesty. His friend, on the other hand, uses Michel's words (as best as he is able to reiterate them) to appeal to Monsieur D.R., who he feels has the power to bring Michel back into the realm of reality and reestablish him in civilization. For the friend, the retelling of Michel's story serves to evince the extent of Michel's dissidence, to detail rather than euphemize the primitive state from which he must be rescued. Ultimately, the friend's intent is to separate Michel from the deviant desire that leads to his demise.

But the story itself focuses on Michel's (sexual) awakening and concomitant awareness that pleasure is contingent on youth, health, and dissidence. During his convalescence in Biskra, Michel wavers between the conventional life to which he is outwardly committed and the exploration of self with which he is secretly preoccupied. He sees his authentic being as linked to a once closed-off past to which his illness has allowed him access:

> I say: it seemed to me, for from the depths of my earliest childhood there awakened at last a thousand glimmerings, a thousand lost memories. My newfound sensual awareness let me acknowledge these for the first time. Yes, my senses, awakened now, were recovering a whole history, were recomposing their own past. They were alive! had never stopped living, had maintained, during all those years of study, a latent and deceitful life.[456]

Unlike Humbert, Michel's lost object is not a vanished person, but a latent sexuality. The object he seeks to replace is the "Old Adam": man, unadulterated. The object he seeks to replace is

[455] Gide, André. *The Immoralist.* Tr. Richard Howard. New York: Vintage Books, 1970. Pg. 7.
[456] *Ibid.* Pg. 37.

himself. In a reformulation of Freud's original postulate, Lacan 'accounts for' homosexuality as a form of unfulfilled and unfulfillable self-desire, contending:

> [The homosexual] exhausts himself in pursuing the desire of the other, which he will never be able to grasp as his own desire, because his own desire is the desire of the other. It is himself he pursues…The intersubjective relation which subtends perverse desire is only sustained either of the desire of the other, or the desire of the subject…in the one as in the other, this relation dissolves the being of the subject.[457]

In this iteration, desire itself is both unquestionable and unknowable; while it cannot be grasped, it is also impossible to deny. While I find Freudian correlations between homosexuality and narcissism intrinsically problematic (not to mention potentially homophobic), the idea of otherness (hetero), and what that otherness entails, allows for a meaningful comparison with the idea of sameness (homo), and what that sameness entails. So, let us, just for a moment, humor the contention that homosexuality *is* somehow rooted, if not in egocentricity or self-absorption, then at least in a desire for the same. If we take this assertion at face value, we can also assume that homosexuality, especially when it has been repressed, represents a longing for self predicated on the loss of what was. Arguably, we see this in Michel's recounting above: "from the depths of my earliest childhood there awakened at last a thousand glimmerings, a thousand lost memories…" His awakening is connected not to what could be, but to what already was. Whereas Humbert longs to recover two parts of a missing whole, seeking both Annabel and himself, Michel aspires toward, and conceivably achieves, a rebirth. Once sublimated past the point of (self-)recognition, he now represents his own lost object.

Laurence Porter maintains that "Michel's unconscious pederasty is rooted in a regressive narcissism and the vain hope of recapturing lost childhood."[458] To the same extent, then, that Humbert reincarnates Annabel in Lolita, Michel reincarnates himself first in the Arab boys and then in Charles. In his polemical *Three Essays,* Freud contends that pederasts are necessarily

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[457] Lacan, Jacques. *Éscrits: A Selection.* Tr. Alan Sheridan. London: Tavistock Publications, 1977. Pg. 221-222.

[458] Porter, Laurence M. "The Generativity of Gide's *Immoralist.*" *French Forum.* Vol. 2, No. 1, 1977. Pg. 63.

narcissistic in that they seek their own visage, their own reincarnation, in young people.[459] This is how Michel rebels against unconquearable time; but this is also how he isolates himself: he renders his ever-changing objects of desire insignificant, dispensable. If we, at least temporarily, buy into homosexuality, and more specifically pederasty, as a form of narcissism, we see Michel's repetition of desire as a desire to recover a more authentic, more sensual self. This self, though, does not grow old with Michel, but is instead (re)discovered in youthful, exuberant adolescence. This is evident in his replacing of his once favorite Arab boy, Bachir, with Ashour. When he finds himself exhausted from an overly ambitious walk, he naturally hopes for company:

> I hoped some child would appear to relieve me of this burden. The one who soon came was a tall boy of fourteen, black as a Sudanese, not at all shy, who volunteered his services. His name was Ashour. If he had not been blind in one eye, I should have found him handsome. He enjoyed chatting, explained where the stream's source was, and how beyond the park it flowed through the entire oasis. I listened to him, forgetting my exhaustion. Attractive though Bachir seemed to me, I knew him too well now, and I was pleased by the change. In fact, I resolved to come down to the park alone another day and to await, on one of the benches, the fortune of further encounters.[460]

Michel never develops a true interest in, let alone an obsession with, any of the boys. He does not try to preserve them or their youth, but instead concentrates on replacing them. The fact that he comes to know Bachir 'too well' renders the boy predictable, dull. Michel, in his new state of sensuousness, demands titillation not from eternal love or the protraction of desire, but from newness. He finds the juvenescence he seeks to emulate in the unknown, foreign object. John Weightman observes:

> Gide is suggesting that the pederastic relationship can never be taken very far by the adult, since it depends less on the personal identity of the loved one than on his attraction as a provisional embodiment of youthful charm; in short, a pederast is probably more in love with

[459] Cf. Freud, Sigmund. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality.* Tr. James Strachey. New York: Basic Books, 1972.
[460] *The Immoralist.* Pg. 34-35.

> youth and beauty than with any particular individual, and thus is hardly an attitude that lends itself to a crusading development.[461]

Michel's relationships with the boys, whether sexual or platonic, are then never afforded the opportunity to evolve. They are limited to furtive glances, quick exchanges. These relationships end the instant they begin; their evanescence paralleling and predicting the end of all things: sensuousness, self, life...

In addition to reincarnating his younger self through the Arab boys, Michel reinvents a second adult identity through a secret alter ego. Once recuperated, he dissembles, playing the faithful husband at home and the debauched libertine abroad. He muses:

> My relations with Marceline therefore remained the same – although more exalted from day to day by an ever-greater love. My very dissimulation (if I may use such a word to express the necessity of shielding my thoughts from her judgment), my dissimulation increased my love. I mean that my enterprise unceasingly involved Marceline. Perhaps this need to lie cost me something, at first: but I soon realized that what are supposedly the worst things (lying, to mention only one) are hard to do only when you have never done them; but that each of them becomes, and so quickly! easy, pleasant, sweet in the repetition, and soon a second nature. Thus, as in each instance when an initial disgust is overcome, I ended by enjoying the dissimulation itself, savoring it as I savored the functioning of my unsuspected facilities. And I advanced every day into a richer, fuller life, toward a more delicious happiness.[462]

Michel attempts, however intentionally, to fulfill his deviant desire through transgression. He finds that the worst things are the easiest to get used to, the most aberrant crimes the most enjoyable to commit. His want of a delicious happiness echoes Augustine's *Confessions*:

> Our only pleasure in [theft] was that it was forbidden. […] The malice of the act was base and I loved it – that is to say I loved my own undoing, I loved the evil in me – not the thing for which I did the evil: my soul was depraved and hurled itself down from security

[461] Weightman, John. "André Gide and the Homosexual Debate." *The American Scholar.* Vol. 59, No. 4, 1990. Pg. 601.
[462] *The Immoralist.* Pg. 60.

> in You into utter destruction, seeking no profit from wickedness but only to be wicked…if I took so much as one bite of any of those [stolen] pears it was the sin that sweetened it.[463]

Dissimulation becomes his means to elusive happiness, fleeting pleasure. Although his deception begins as a way to avoid Marceline's judgment, Michel soon finds that it is the deception itself that brings him joy. It is through the tacit realization that transgression, and *lying* in particular, is exhilarating (if not aphrodisiacal) that Michel begins to differentiate between conventional love and illicit desire. This distinction allows him to venerate his wife, on the one hand, while thrilling in his betrayal of her on the other. The ease and indifference with which he betrays her stems from his failure to assimilate his expected role as husband. He admits, "I had lived for myself or at least my own terms till then; I had married without imagining my wife as anything but a comrade, without really supposing that, by our union, my life might be transformed."[464] Although he does eventually come to see his wife as something other than a comrade, he never sees her as an object of desire. Instead, she evokes the infallible (because closed-off, etiolated) 'angel of the house.' Due to this elevated status, Marceline is recast as greater than, holier than, human. Her imagined purity prevents her potential defilement; she becomes (with the exception of a single night) untouchable.

In the previous chapter, we saw Freud contrast the 'angel of the house' (the maternal, the virtuous) with the so-called debased object, asserting, "Where they [presumably men] love they do not desire and where they desire they do not love."[465] This postulate leads to two realizations: first, that (sexual) desire is rooted in prohibition, and second, that love and (sexual) desire are not only distinct but irreconcilable. In *Ecrits,* Jacques Lacan explains that "desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the phenomenon of their splitting (*Spaltung*)."[466] This splitting is ultimately what necessitates the debased object which, along with the 'appetite for satisfaction,' has been subtracted from conventional notions of love. Catherine Belsey explains that "true love is thought

[463] Augustine. *Confessions.* Tr. F.J. Sheed. London: Sheed and Ward, 1944. Pg. iii-iv.
[464] *The Immorlaist.* Pg. 13.
[465] Freud, Sigmund. "On the Universal Tendency to Debasement [Erniedrigung] in the Sphere of Love." Redditch: Read Books, Ltd., 2014. Pg. 251.
[466] Lacan, Jacques. *Ecrits: A Selection.* Tr. Alan Sheridan. London: Tavistock Publications, 1977. Pg. 287.

of as an essential part of the natural order. And yet […], there is another nature, another equally fundamental category, and this is the arbitrary, irrational turbulence of sensuality."[467]

This means the object of desire cannot be the beneficiary of true love; it of course also means that Michel, once he has named his love for Marceline, can no longer desire her. This paradox renders marriage, as an institution in which love and desire are meant to converge, intrinsically problematic. Marriage, for as much as it is an institution meant to facilitate and preserve monogamous procreation, is also a social/moral construct intended to impede the consummation of deviant desire. It is intended to keep desire *as such* in check. The paradox, or problem, lies in the fact that in its attempt to thwart extramarital desire, the institution of marriage actually creates it. This is especially true for Michel, who seeks, and arguably finds, pleasure not only in undermining his marital vows, but in deceiving the person to whom he makes them. The intended containment of sexuality through marriage essentially engenders subversion, dissidence. Desire itself then finds its footing in prohibition, in the hollow of a demand that not only cannot but *should not* be met.

This idea that desire is rooted in prohibition is also supported throughout *Sabbath's Theater.* It is clear that Sabbath, like Michel, finds satisfaction in defying his marital vows, for it is the betrayal of first Nikki and later Roseanna that renders his extramarital trysts risky and therefore exciting. But Sabbath is a dissembler by trade, a *performer*, whose performances, whether staged or impromptu, teem with sexual innuendo. His unsublimated self is not only exposed but paraded, commodified. He is so outrageous in his carnal displays, in fact, that his infidelity is never called into question; instead, it is known, perhaps even accepted.

It is Drenka who, like Michel, revels in the forbiddance and furtiveness of her rendezvous; it is she who masters dissimulation. In a re-articulation of Michel's anti-conformist sentiment, she divulges the source of her pleasure to Sabbath: "Oh, Mickey, it was wonderful, it was fun – the whole kitten and kaboozle. It was like *living*. And to be denied that whole part would be a great loss. You gave it to me. You gave me a double life. I couldn't have endured with just one."[468] Here Drenka

[467] *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture.* Pg. 24.
[468] Roth, Philip. *Sabbath's Theater.* New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995. Pg. 428.

references the unfreedom of marriage and family and pinpoints (sexual) deviance as the only reprieve from the strictures of prescriptive morality. While civilization 'kills life,' dissemblance reinvigorates, making one feel as though they were not only living but living *freely.* It is no wonder that Drenka relies on a secret diary to reconstruct the moments in which she repudiated the familial commitments constraining her. The diary, like Humbert's memoir, is made known only after the death of its subject. Following her funeral, it is Drenka's husband and son who discover the diary and scroll its contents. And, in an ironic twist, it is Matthew who finds Sabbath desecrating his mother's grave and who accuses him of her defilement. As a police officer, Matthew epitomizes prohibition, unfreedom, law. But in his brief confrontation with Sabbath, he loses his command; no longer a figure of patriarchal authority, he stands before Sabbath a son who has discovered his mother's alternate identity, who has been made ruefully aware of the sexuality she, as a mother, was not meant to have. He is a boy, ashamed. Rather than arresting Sabbath, Matthew discloses the existence of Drenka's diary and his knowledge of their affair. Doing so does not lead Sabbath to consider the harm he has caused Drenka's family, but to ruminate the purpose of the diary and why Drenka had kept it from him:

> It had never occurred to him that Drenka was writing everything down. In English or Serbo-Croatian? Out of pride or incredulity? To trace the course of her daring or depravity? Why hadn't she warned him in the hospital that there was this diary? Too sick by then to think of it? Had leaving it to be found been inadvertent, an oversight, or the boldest thing she had ever done?[469]

The diary confounds Sabbath because it demonstrates the extent of Drenka's daring and depravity (it was, after all, always at risk of being found); but, equally confounding for Sabbath is the proof of Drenka's agency. Through her diary, she undermines the power the men who loved her had wrongly assumed they possessed over her. She fooled her husband and son, her patrons and community; she even fooled her innumerable lovers, including Sabbath.

More than a mere accomplice or apprentice, Drenka, though perhaps inspired, even *freed,* by Sabbath, acts on her own impulses, embraces her own (deviant) desire. She keeps the diary hidden to keep Sabbath from adulterating or even violating her inchoate sense of self. In this, Drenka,

[469] *Ibid.* Pg. 446-447.

whose broken English and petite stature cast her as childlike, becomes the very adult, very adroit, face of feminine (if not feminist) liberation. She presents a drastic shift from Marceline, who, though insightful, lacks self-determination and ultimately lives and dies under Michel's (patriarchal) authority.

Female sexuality is integral to this discussion of masculinism and masculinist desire in that it reflects changing views about what it means to be (sexually) free and about who has rights or access to such freedom. Although this dissertation focuses primarily on the three male protagonists of the three masculinist works, here is perhaps a good place to pause and again tie the supporting female characters into this inquiry. After all, the ways in which they are depicted and in which they interact with, or even acquiesce to, the demands of their male counterparts are revealing of masculinist conviction, incertitude and paranoia. In other words, these female characters indicate the changing *Weltanschauung* of the men who create them. So, what exactly does masculinism *think* of women?

Masculinism as such is innately introspective. We see this in Michel's endeavor to better understand himself and in Humbert's (psycho)analytical musings; we also see this in each protagonist's (constant, scrupulous) reimagining of the past. In fact, using *The Immoralist, Lolita* and *Sabbath's Theater,* it is possible to trace a masculinist arc rooted in rumination, often expressed as memoir or confession, about lack of freedom, insatiable desire, and (relations with) women. Let us focus for just a moment on masculinist attitudes toward women and female sexuality. Sabbath contemplates the contents and objectives of Drenka's diary in part because he, in the latter part of the twentieth century, is faced with the prospect of female ascendency, and he senses the precariousness of his own position. Her sexuality is concomitantly arousing and menacing. While it enables him to act out his desire, it also threatens to unsettle his uncertain sense of self. Michel's tacit views on female sexuality, however, seem more aligned with Freud's; he sees the libido as intrinsically masculine and Marceline as devoid of (sexual) desire. It is only when she relinquishes her religion, and thus her virtue, that she disturbs Michel's worldview. In dropping her rosary, she abdicates the morality she is meant to embody. She is no longer the 'angel of the house,' but a woman with the freedom to let go, with the freedom to fade to nothing.

The combination of female desire and autonomy results in the masculinist paranoia that emerges during the latter part of the twentieth century. In Sabbath, and subsequently Roth, though, we find a reluctant acceptance of the infiniteness of (female) sexuality and desire as such. The reluctance is made apparent in Sabbath's surprise in, and obvious unease about, Drenka's hidden diary and his consternation that Roseanna, whose diary he also reads, never mentions him, that Roseanna's diary details not Sabbath's but her father's betrayal of her. Here the diary assumes the same function as a confession in that it reconstructs the past in an attempt to pin down meaning; it is both an accounting and reckoning of something, someone, that has not been mentally processed and gotten over. Because Drenka does not tell him about, and thus include him in, her reconstruction of sexual encounters and because Roseanna essentially erases him from her personal history, Sabbath finds himself in an unwanted position of exteriority. He is the victim of female abjection. This of course instills in him a resentfulness of female desire, an anxiety about female agency, but it does not prevent him from acknowledging the desire to recover a lost object is not a male phenomenon. Memoir, confession, and diary are the tangible artifacts of this travail and the evidence of its non-binarity.

Sabbath anyway represents an interesting example of someone who wants to recover a lost object for whom his (sexual) desire is never fully realized. In this, he is not unlike Roseanna, who is consumed by, and consumptive because of, her father's abuses against her. The problem for Roseanna is that for all her father did to her (the molestation, presumably the rape), she cannot distance herself from the fondness she nevertheless had for him as an exploited child. She had wanted to please him and felt seen, approbated, when she did. The problem is that she cannot, even now as a broken adult, bring herself to hate him. Although Sabbath was never the victim of sexual abuse, he was quite clearly the victim of unintentional neglect. His once attentive mother retracted her affection, ceased her happy whistling, the moment Morty was shot down over the Philippines. Sabbath, for all his paraded degeneracy and clever distancing and detachment, is a lonely boy who yearns for his mother's love. If this sounds too Freudian, too Oedipal, it is because Roth seems to have constructed Sabbath with Freud in mind; this is nowhere more apparent than in the ghost of his mother, the looming lost object to whom he cannot hold on and of whom he cannot let go.

Slavoj Žižek points out that the specter is the at once material and immaterial symbol of "unsettled accounts."[470] Because Sabbath has not been able overcome the rejection he felt when his mother drew into herself and away from him, he is now confronted with her apparition. But the account he must settle with her is not as straightforward as it seems. The feelings he harbors for her are neither filial nor platonic; throughout most of the novel he conjures her not when he is alone or lonely or in want of maternal comfort, but when he is engaging in intercourse. His feelings for his mother are therefore clearly rooted in sexual longing. We could of course analyze why this is: the liminal stage he was at when Morty died, the mother as first object of desire (or admiring *selfobject*), his failure (perhaps because of his dissociation) to replace her with an appropriate object of desire. But doing so would simply be projecting. Important here is that he wants to recover his mother and be recovered by her; even his dalliances with Drenka cannot prevent or even curb that desire:

> When, while he was fucking Drenka up at the Grotto, his mother hovering just above his shoulder, over him like the home plate umpire peering in from behind the catcher's back, he would wonder if she had somehow popped out of Drenka's cunt the moment before he entered it, if that was where his mother's spirit lay curled up, patiently awaiting his appearance.[471]

In his nirvana principle, Freud postulates that a desire to return to the mother's womb (where the unborn child is untouched by suffering and impervious to desire) indicates an innate instinct to return to an inorganic state. Sabbath's rendering of his mother as the spirit of Drenka's womb, or perhaps the womb in general, speaks to his at first hidden desire for death.

Inasmuch as he misses his mother and wants to recover her and the endlessness that marked his childhood, what he has created in her specter is not an accurate representation of what was, but the manifestation of a problem that is. Sabbath cannot recover the lost object of his desire, his mother, but can only try to reincarnate her in a sexualized replacement. And when Drenka dies so does Sabbath's endeavor to recover or replace what was; it is then that he too begins to envision his

[470] Žižek, Slavoj. *The Mestases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Women and Causality.* New York: Verso, 1994. Pg. 193.
[471] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 29.

own end. The ghost of his mother, in this context, becomes the embodiment of death, the symbol of the beyond:

> And just who did he think he was talking to? A self-induced hallucination, a betrayal of reason, something which with to magnify the inconsequentiality of a meaningless mess – *that's* what his mother was, another of his puppets, his last puppet, an invisible marionette flying around on strings, cast in the role not of guardian angel but of the departed spirit making ready to ferry him to his next abode. To a life that ha d come to nothing, a crude theatrical instinct was lending a garish, pathetic touch of last-minute drama.[472]

The specter then is of Sabbath's own making; he, the consummate puppeteer, holds the strings to this last marionette. His mother comes to haunt him so that he might settle his final account, so he might return to the inorganic state that knows neither suffering nor desire. This is Sabbath, deplete of companionship, now the ultimate outsider, the ultimate dissident, asking for freedom not in but from life.

For Michel, in contrast to Sabbath, desire stems from a new connection to life and increasing fear of death. It is during his convalescence that he begins to realize this. When he finds himself terror-stricken by one of the hemorrhages that had before left him indifferent, almost serene, he reasons: "Then what was causing my horror, my fear now? The fact that I was beginning, alas, to love life."[473] Throughout his recovery, Michel's self-perception evolves; he begins to see himself differently, as a dead man risen. He remembers touching parts of himself in what seems an effort to piece himself back together:

> I took my hand, I remember, my left in my right; I wanted to lift it to my face, and I did so. Why? to affirm that I was alive and to find it good to be alive. I touched my forehead, my eyelids. A shudder ran through me. A day will come, when even to raise to my lips the very water I thirst for most, I will no longer have the strength.[474]

[472] *Ibid.* Pg. 111.
[473] *The Immoralist.* Pg. 25.
[474] *Ibid.* Pg. 47.

Michel's illness has shown him the temporality but also the potential of his existence. The awareness of a segmented body, his two separate hands, his forehead and eyelids, that come together to form him, man, evokes the Nietzschean hope that mortality might be overcome, that man might be molded and perfected *by man*. Although Michel knows his existence to be fleeting, he cannot help but feel like a man resurrected, given new life. When back in Paris he feels suffocated by the constant barrage of appointments to be kept and visitors to be entertained, he reflects on his new understanding of what it means to be alive:

> Yet I couldn't have said what I meant by *living*, nor whether my longing for a more spacious and exposed life, a life less constrained and less concerned for others, was not the very secret of my uneasiness – a secret which seemed so much more mysterious: the secret of Lazarus, for I was still a stranger among others, like a man raised from the dead.[475]

In this passage we sense Michel's longing to flee the civilization to which he and Marceline have returned. We understand that his desire for a spacious and exposed life is grounded in his awakening abroad, in foreign Biskra. Michel, given new life, does not want to squander it through a life of convention. Instead, he wants to return to the Arab boys whose vitality inspired his own. But there is no recovery of the lost object; there is no return to youth. Michel's conception of a new awakening is an illusion of rehabilitation. When, at the end of novel, he, like Sabbath, finds himself grappling for meaning, he finds none. He summons his friends like Sabbath does his mother, but Michel is not looking for a detour to death: "Tear me away from this place now," he begs, "give me some reason to live. I myself no longer know where to look."[476]

For each of the masculinist protagonists, desire represents a loss that cannot be overcome. For Michel it is the loss of a true self he discovers too late, of a self that is at odds with the culture in which he is embedded. For Humbert, it is the loss of Annabel that leads to the symbolic death of all nymphets and the degenerates who love them. He notes that such creatures are like the "cheapest of cheap cuties. For that is what they imitate – while we moan and die."[477] For Sabbath,

[475] *Ibid.* Pg. 92.
[476] *Ibid.* Pg. 169.
[477] *Lolita.* Pg. 128.

it is life as loss; it is life that can be neither overcome nor extinguished. For him, it is the protraction of suffering.

It seems the masculinist protagonist is bound to misery. Perhaps he is. But until he announces his dejection, which each does in the final pages of the books in which their stories are told, he is hopeful. He knows happiness cannot be found in the civilization that on some level consumed his lost object and rendered him forever, incorrigibly desirous; he knows that if happiness is to be found at all, it is to be found in the foreign.

NOMADISM AND THE EROTICIZATION OF THE FOREIGN

Until now, this exploration has rooted itself, however critically, within a masculinist framework, dissecting, analyzing, and projecting from the inside out. This last chapter will take a different approach, not because after all this this dissertation now seeks to vilify masculinism as an either dated or rogue literary mode, but because there has been a rightful vicissitude of scholarly interpretation of (at least one of) these texts that I find relevant to this inquiry. Postcolonial studies has changed the way literary scholars interpret and problematize works, like *The Immoralist,* that speaks to the increasing awareness of and sensitivity to the continued effects of colonialism/imperialism in areas that have been previously demarcated as both primitive and other. Additionally, it has shown the extent to which artists, like Gide, have sought sexual freedom in the foreign and have subverted Western morality by confounding actual places like North Africa (Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia) with the imaginary realm of fantasy, pleasure.

It has never been the purpose of this inquiry to either challenge or uphold the moral tenets masculinism undermines, much less to read (or condemn) masculinist transgression from a moralistic viewpoint. As Gide himself attests, "There are no [literary, moral] problems, for which the work of art is not the sufficient solution."[478] It would therefore be gratuitous to judge either characters or writers on the basis of their perceived morality or indecency. That said, avoiding the problems Gide mentions as a way of evidencing literary/analytical detachment, as a formalist approach might, seems negligent. In *The Immoralist*, we as readers are faced with a moral dilemma regarding the eroticization and subsequent exploitation of the foreign other. This chapter does not aim to solve but to situate this dilemma within the postcolonialist's theoretical understanding of it.

My decision to neither italicize nor place in quotation marks terms used in the colonial/imperial endeavor to distinguish and subordinate the foreign other is advertent. In *Gone Primitive,* Marianna Torgovnick points out, "When we put *primitive* in quotation marks, we in a sense wish away the heritage of the West's exploitation of non-Western peoples or at least wish to demonstrate that we are politically correct."[479] In this, such gestures, though surely enacted with the best of intentions,

[478] Gide, André. *The Immoralist* (preface). Tr. Richard Howard. New York: Vintage Books, 1970. Pg. xiv.
[479] Torgovnick, Marianna. *Gone Primitive.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990. Pg. 20.

serve to draw more attention to the writer, their virtue, than to the polemic of the terms themselves. For this reason, this inquiry will strive for some objectivity knowing that some of the language it integrates is charged and potentially injurious. It is my hope that the abrasiveness of these archaisms will itself serve to problematize them.

The first part of this chapter will begin by tracing the emergence of postcolonial studies to early ethnographic explorations of the primitive in order to show the way in which the West, however intentionally, constructed myths of the Orient that would inevitably draw the attention of sexual nonconformists like André Gide. It will then pinpoint passages from *The Immoralist* that speak to the idea that areas like North Africa, because primitive, are therefore also infinitely (homo)sexual. There will be a short discussion of allusions to the eroticized foreign in *Lolita* and *Sabbath's Theater* before the latter part of the chapter transitions to a literary nomadism, evident in all three of the works, grounded in notions of the primitive.

In his seminal treatise on "Orientalism," published in 1978, which arguably led to the inception and ubiquity of postcolonial theory in the 1980s and 1990s, Edward Said justly calls into question the practices of the mostly European ethnographers whose work, however purposefully, drew a traceable line between the civilized West and primitive East. Of these Orientalist scholars, he remarks:

> When a learned Orientalist traveled in the country of his specialization it was always with abstract unshakable maxims about the 'civilization' which he had studied; rarely were Orientalists interested in anything except proving the validity of these musty 'truths' by applying them without great success to uncompromising, hence degenerate, natives.[480]

This point, that scholars projected their prejudices onto their subjects rather than drawing conclusions based on any valid evidence, is made clear in Said's criticism of *Déscription de l'Egypte*, a series of ethnographic publications that essentially sought to catalog Egypt. The series was authored by a number of French researchers between 1809 and 1829 under the shared title of *Commission des sciences et arts d'Egypte*. The authors comprised a funded scientific commission

[480] Said, Edward W. "Orientalism." *The Georgia Review.* Vol. 31, No. 1, 1977. Pg. 165.

that created its own illusion of legitimacy. But the commission's purport was not so much to better understand Egypt as to save it from its now primitive state, to restore it to past greatness. Said identifies its aims as such:

> To restore a nation its present barbarism to its former classical greatness; to instruct (for its own benefit) the Orient in the ways of the modern West; to subordinate or underplay military intervention in order to aggrandize the project of acquiring priceless knowledge in the process of political domination in the Orient; to formulate the Orient, to give it shape, identity, definition with a full recognition of its place in memory, its importance to imperial strategy, and its 'natural' role as an appendage of Europe; to dignify all the knowledge collected during the colonial occupation with the title 'contribution to modern learning' when the natives had neither been consulted nor treated as anything except pre-texts for a text, whose usefulness is not to the natives; to feel oneself, as a European, in command, almost at will, of Oriental history, time and geography; to institute new areas of specialization; to establish new disciplines; to divide, deploy, schematize, tabulate, index and record everything in sight (and out of sight); to make out of every observable detail a generalization and out of every generalization an immutable law about the Oriental nature, temperament, mentality, custom or type; and, above all, to transmute living reality into the stuff of texts, to possess (or think one possesses) actuality mainly because as a European nothing in the Orient seems to resist one's powers: these are the features of the Orientalist projection fully realized in *Déscription de l'Egypte*, itself enabled and reinforced by Napolean's wholly Orientalist engulfment of Egypt by the instruments of Western knowledge and power.[481]

Although the commission was not the first to articulate, and thus validate, derogatory generalizations of the Orient or to render the primitive in need of saving, it served to further enforce negative stereotypes about the East as the (mythical) barbaric realm located beyond (and *below*) the civilized West. "The Orient ('out there' towards the East)," Said explains, "is corrected, even penalized, for lying outside the boundaries of European society, 'our' world; the Orient is thus *Orientalized*, a process that not only marks the Orient as the province of the Orientalist, but also forces the uninitiated Western reader to accept Orientalist codifications […] as the *true* Orient."[482]

[481] "Orientalism." Pg. 199.
[482] "Orientalism." Pg. 180.

Déscription de l'Egypte and similar studies, like those that had concomitantly emanated from the New World on native savages, presented platitudes as researched, supported postulates. They brought the image of the savage, the primitive, and the barbaric, however incompletely and incorrectly, to life. The definitions and descriptions of the foreign Other highlighted in these studies captivated the imagination of the West, prompting what V.G. Kiernan describes as "Europe's collective daydream of the Orient."[483] This explains why adventure seeking writers like Joseph Conrad and social theorists like Sigmund Freud would want to traverse the primitive 'heart of darkness' and see, discover, these uncivilized, barbaric societies for themselves.

It is not surprising that Freud, whose work relies on the distinction between the civilized and primordial, would have had stakes in the budding field of Orientalism. Indeed, he, as we have seen, often and volubly distinguishes between the civilized or sublimated and the primitive or unsublimated. In fact, he, whom we tend to above all identify as a psychoanalyst, was himself an Orientalist scholar, an expert, who linked degeneracy, man's primal state, to primitivism. In *Totem and Taboo*, published in 1913, Freud addresses the then regnant ideas about the primitive, including incest taboos, through his anthropological study of the Australian Aborigines. Although he argues that primitivism is "a necessary state of development through which every race has passed,"[484] an assertion that suggests both its universality and naturalness, he also implies the lack of development, the stuntedness, of societies whose imagined barbarism seems not transitory but static. In addition, Freud correlates the primitive to the sexual, noting that the incest taboo is necessary within these societies to prevent intrafamilial coitus and reproduction. This taboo, however, seems to be the only limit placed on sexuality, and unlike the taboos of Western morality, its function is strictly utilitarian. What is concerning about Freud here, however, is not so much his assertions, but the extent to which they inspired others to further define and devalue the East.

Torgovnick recognizes Freud in the work of later sexual ethnographers, including Alfred Burdon Ellis, whose book *The Sexual Life of Savages* proved pivotal in painting the primitive as hypersexual and aggressive. She groups Ellis with other Freudians who searched for truth in their

[483] Cf. "Orientalism."
[484] Freud, Sigmund. *Totem and Taboo.* Tr. James Strachey. New York: Norton, 1950. Pg. 29.

explorations of the foreign, noting, "This group of thinkers shared the same goal, even when they disagreed on details: they sought the universal truth about human nature and conceived of primitive societies as the testing ground, the laboratory, the key to that universal truth."[485] Their endeavor was rooted in the Freudian postulate that primitivism is predicated on a lack of sublimation, an authenticity, indicative of a primal self. Primitivism is then the "id forces"[486]; it is an innate, though often repressed, animality.

But this endeavor to unearth the pre-civilized truth about humankind was hardly innocuous. It served to uphold the truths of primitivism the early Orientalists had propagated, disseminated. It reiterated the distinction between East and West, illiterate and learned, savage and civilized. Said reflects:

> A line is drawn between two continents. Europe is powerful and articulate; Asia is defeated and distant. […] It is Europe that articulates the Orient; this articulation is the prerogative not so much of a puppet-master as a genuine creator, whose life-giving power represents, animates, constitutes the otherwise silent and dangerous space beyond human boundaries.[487]

In this the Orient was delineated, defined, but these delineations and definitions proved both crude and malleable. The Orient, as an embodiment of the primitive, is not limited to Asia, as the above excerpt suggests; after all, it is not a delineable place at all, but an idea. It encompasses alterity, foreign otherness, *inferiority* as such. In this, the scope of the term is vast and includes primitive societies (the native, the aboriginal) but also the religiously other, particularly the prophet Mohammed and his adherents of Islam. This explains why Said, in a work on Orientalism, focuses much of his critique on scholars of Middle Eastern and North African primitivism. In *The Homoerotics of Orientalism*, Joseph Allen Boone explains that "'orientalism,' for Said, articulates and names the combined interests that have constructed the Middle East as one [of the West's] deepest and most recurring images of the Other."[488]

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[485] *Gone Primitive.* Pg. 7.
[486] *Ibid.* Pg. 8.
[487] "Orientalism." Pg. 170.
[488] Boone, Joseph Allen. *The Homoerotics of Orientalism.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. Pg. 24.

To create adverse myths about Islam and the areas in which it is practiced - North Africa, the Middle East - the figurehead of the religion had to be recast as an embodiment of immoralism, degeneracy. Said explains:

> Since Mohammed was viewed as the disseminator of a false Revelation, he became as well the epitome of lechery, debauchery, sodomy, and a whole battery of assorted treacheries, all of which derived 'logically' from his doctrinal impostures. Thus the Orient acquired representatives, so to speak, and representations – each one more concrete, more internally congruent with some Western exigency, than the ones that proceeded it.[489]

This explanation accounts for the (homo)sexualization of Islam and the way in which the West depicted countries like Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia as places of depravity, on the one hand, and the potential loci of sexual freedom, on the other. Boone continues:

> In formats fictional and nonfictional, public and private, written and visual, generations of Anglo-Europeans since the opening of the Middle East to Western diplomacy and trade have recorded their impressions of the seemingly rampant exercise of sodomy and pederasty that haunts their imagined and actual encounters with its cultures, issuing in everything from shrill diatribes against the ungodly 'vice' that separates heathens from the saved to poetic reveries in which male homoeroticism subtly insinuates itself as a temptation no longer to be resisted. The essence of any Orientalizing erotics lies in the projection of desire deemed unacceptable or forbidden at home onto a foreign terrain […][490]

This of course leads to the potential problem that postcolonial theory, rooted in Said's critique of Orientalism, finds in writers like André Gide and in literary texts like *The Immoralist.* After all, Gide, like Michel, had gone to North Africa to convalesce and, while there, discovered and acted out his homosexual/pederastic predilections. John Weightman reminds us that "his first experiences were with Arab adolescents or pre-adolescents in North Africa, as he explains in his autobiography. He was in his early twenties at the time, and in a state of heightened sensibility

[489] "Orientalism." Pg. 175.
[490] *The Homoerotics of Orientalism.* Pg. 5.

because of incipient tuberculosis."[491] This is of course not to say that Michel *is* Gide, or that fiction should be read, judged, as if real. But, as readers, our quandary with Michel reflects our quandary with Gide. Because there are parallels between the two that are impossible to disregard, we feel somehow complicit, like Michel's friends, in this 'realish' narrative. There are stakes in this story; it feels there is much to be lost, little to be gained. But this is the problem with and power of the work. It puts us all in a precarious position in which we know not whether or not we are meant, or whether we ought, to reach a conclusion or to release a verdict.

Although Jonathan Dollimore posits that "Gide's experience in Africa is one of the most significant modern narratives of homosexual liberation,"[492] it is equally possible to see his experience as indicative of the Western exploitation of the primitive other. Gordon Schulz maintains, "In *The Immoralist*, Gide exposed the moral bankruptcy of an extreme individualism that disregards the needs and rights of others and that implicitly accepts French colonial rule of North Africa."[493] The Orient, then, had become a contradiction: it was (sexually) liberating for Western travelers like Gide, whose liberation, however, was achieved at the expense of the exploitation, the subordination, of its (adolescent) native populations.

The exploitation rested on and was enabled through what could, however controversially, be attributed to *mere* cultural difference. Significantly, this appeal to difference surfaces in Humbert's defense of his violations against Lolita and in Sabbath's raging against conservative (whether Jewish or Puritan) morality; simply put, this cultural difference that enables exploitation stems from the arbitrariness of (sexual, cultural) normativity, from the fact that what is permitted in one place or at one time might be prohibited in another place or another time. Boone *carefully* formulates this (cultural) confusion:

> Without minimizing the pedophilic (and predatory) desires of an expatriate […], it is worth noting that from the perspective of pre-modern society and many contemporary third-world cultures, the

[491] Weightman, John. "André Gide and the Homosexual Debate." *The American Scholar.* Vol. 59, No. 4, 1990. Pg. 592.
[492] Dollimore, Jonathan. *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991. Pg. 12.
[493] Schulz, Gordan A. "Guilty Man and Tragic Man in Decadent Tales of 'Fin-De-Siècle' Europe." *International Journal of Psychoanalytic Self Psychology.* Vol. 4. Pg. 18.

> term 'underage sex' often carries little meaning and less of the moral condemnation it accrues in European post-Enlightenment constructions of childhood as an innocent state and sex as an adult activity.[494]

This means that underage sex (what we call rape) is not always acknowledged as either deviant, *criminal,* or punishable in some parts of the world; ultimately, this means that what we see as the sexual violation of a minor can, in some places and at some points in time, be viewed as acceptable if not consensual. But this inquiry does not wish to (de)merit or impugn what we might think abhorrent or barbaric. Here I differentiate between *us*, the way *we* see things, and *them* not to show superiority, but to show the extent to which villainy and goodness is a matter of cultural perspective. That said, this differentiation is not meant, to use Boone's terminology, to 'minimize'; and it is certainly not meant to gloss over or to exonerate.

So, at the risk of infusing this dissertation with Orientalist notions of the other, I would, like Boone, *carefully* assert that the West has profited from more lax views on that which is sexually permissible, or at least that which is not explicitly prohibited, within some cultures. For in such cultures there is of course opportunity.

Part of this opportunity, at least within ancient Greek and some more modern Muslim cultures, arises from the (however prevalent) existence and valuation of the catamite: the boy (secretly or openly) 'kept' for homosexual intercourse. These boys, according to the early-modern explorer Henry Blount, are a man's "serious lovers" since "wives are used (as the Turks themselves told me) but to dress their meat, to Laundresse, and for reputation."[495] The imagined prevalence of the catamite within these societies is in part the product of the cultural myths surrounding Islam, which Boone identifies as follows:

> One is the ubiquitous image of the beautiful boy as an object of ardent male desire. Second is the myth of age-differentiated and gender-defined sodomy as *the* primary formation of male-male sexuality in Islamicate culture. Third are fantasies of the *hamam* (or

[494] *The Homoerotics of Orientalism.* Pg. 65-66.
[495] Blount, Henry. *A Voyage into the Levant.* London: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1977. Pg. 14.

> bathhouse) as a privileged spatial locus for male erotic encounters.[496]

The idea that homosexuality, and indeed pederasty or pedophilia, is not only practiced but widely accepted within some (Oriental) cultures has of course led to the Western exploitation of this perceived cultural difference; it has also created a market for Western travelers to pay for the services that would be illegal within their own (prohibitive, 'no-saying') social structures. The opening of this market proved transformative for artists like Gide who would not have been permitted to openly acknowledge, much less act on, their (pedophilic) predilections had they not entered, and arguably abused, the Orient. Of Gide, John Weightman observes, "His sex life presumably depended for a large part on prostitution, and what would legally count, at least in Europe, as corruption of minors, even if the minors in question were willing to oblige."[497] For Gide, then, sexual freedom exists abroad, in the foreign. In *Carnets d'Égypte,* he admits in a rare moment of candor, "I mean to say that a country only pleases me if multiple occasions of fucking present themselves. The most beautiful monuments in the world cannot replace that, why not own it frankly?"[498]

The Immoralist can be read as a discovery of and return to the Orient, to the idea of unmitigated pleasure North Africa seems to embody. The text reflects Said's definition of Orientalism as a "collection of dreams, images, and vocabularies available to anyone who has ever tried to talk about what lies East of the dividing line."[499] In this, the Orient is difficult to pin down or decipher. It is therefore open to individual (mis)interpretation. But one thing is clear: there exists a polarity between the Orient and civilization and a notion of alterity that wards the divide.

On a literary/artistic level, especially during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Orient becomes a place of performance, an alternate reality in which (sexual) fantasies can be acted out, aestheticized. Boone asserts:

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[496] *The Homoerotics of Orientalism.* Pg. 51.
[497] "André Gide and the Homosexual Debate." Pg. 593.
[498] Gide, André. *Carnets d'Égypte.* Preface by Gilles Leroy. Paris: Gallimard, 1993. Pg. 547.
[499] "Orientalism." Pg. 186.

> The representation of the East as a stage, a spectacle, and 'tableau vivant' on which Europe acts out its psychic dramas – maintaining all the while the pose of the distanced onlooker, speaks to those elements of projection, fantasy, fetishism, and voyeurism that repeatedly mark the erotic trajectories of the texts examined in this book [*The Homoerotics of Orientalism*]. And, indeed, the appropriation of foreignness to project onto it an otherness that reflects Anglo-European fantasies of sexual taboo is both a rhetorical strategy and a common by-product of Orientalist writing.[500]

In a subtle allusion to André Gide and Oscar Wilde, Bill Readings observes, "Paganism, it seems, is the old spectre of *fin de siècle* perversion and decadence."[501] The Orient, then, is where decadence blurs the lines between doctrine (the words on the page) and indoctrination (the realization, the living out, of those words). Wilde insisted on making a spectacle of his theories, his sexuality and himself; this was part of his craft. Gide was both more ambivalent and cautious, but it is nevertheless evident that for him, as for Wilde and Michel, the East is synonymous with the erotic, the taboo, and the authentic.

In *The Immoralist* the juxtaposition of France and North Africa serves to stress cultural difference, to highlight the disparity between the civilized and the primitive. But unlike early Orientalists and ethnographers who sought to define the East as a means to subordinate it, Michel finds in the primitive an aesthetic value, a sensualism, missing in 'high' bourgeois culture. Roger Pensom argues that "Africa, rather than being simply 'south of Europe,' is placed in relation of metaphorical opposition to it. Thus, the African thematic of the story centres on the paradigmatic class, some of whose members are 'nature,' 'individual,' 'instinctive,' which in syntagmatic combination constitutes one aspect of the story's organization."[502] This paradigmatic relation speaks to the idea that the primitive has the potential to return man to his primordial (natural, individualistic, instinctive) state and to thus undermine, obliterate, the social structure of which he is, or was, a part.

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[500] *The Homoerotics of Orientalism.* Pg. 25.
[501] Readings, Bill. "Pagans, Perverts or Primitives? Experimental Justice in the Empire Capital." *Posthumanism.* Ed. Neil Badmington. New York: Palgrave, 2000. Pg. 112.
[502] Pensom, Roger. "Narrative Structure and Authenticity in *L'Immoraliste.*" *The Modern Language Review.* Vol. 84, No. 4, 1989. Pg. 834.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud finds "a compulsion inherent in organic life to restore an earlier stage of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces," an "organic elasticity" or "inertia inherent in organic life."[503] The primitive can be seen as the embodiment of this state, of this return to the earlier stage (which the *Commission des sciences et arts d'Egypte* wanted to reverse in Egypt) that is the antithesis of civilization and its values. The 'external disturbing forces' which first modified man, 'the living entity,' can be seen as the tenets of morality. The primitive, then, in promising or at least allowing for a return to what was, also promises or allows for the undoing of what is. Marcuse contends that "civilization has to defend itself against the specter of a world which could be free."[504] This specter is realized in the dream of the Orient. It is no wonder, then, that Michel's rebellion, his so-called experiment with freedom, should find its footing in North Africa.

In *The Immoralist,* Michel contrasts two types of Oriental landscapes: the desert and the oasis. The oasis, which he first experiences during his convalescence in Biskra, indicates dynamism, circulation, life. Louis A. MacKenzie convincingly argues that the ecstasy Michel feels when he immerses himself in the water "has to do with a special kind of joy. It is, quite literally, a movement away from stasis; in this case, away from a static and bookish world devoid of real experience."[505] The movement, the flow, of the water represents an existence unadulterated by culture, unaffected by education, religion, morality. It is pure, alive, in motion.

The oasis mirrors, symbolizes, health and the circulation of fluid, the body's internal spring. This is why Michel is so taken by the sight of the flowing blood when Bachir cuts his thumb:

> I shuddered, but he only laughed, holding up the shiny cut and happily watching the blood run out of it. When he laughed, he showed his brilliant white teeth, then licked the wound with delight; his tongue was pink as a cat's. How healthy he was! That was what

[503] Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle.* New York: Liveright Publishing Corp., 1950. Pg. 47.
[504] *Eros and Civilization.* Pg. 93.
[505] MacKenzie, Louis A. "The Language of Excitation in Gide's *L'Immoraliste.*" *Romance Quarterly.* Vol. 37, Iss. 3, 1990. Pg. 313.

> beguiled be about him: health. The health of the little boy was beautiful.[506]

At this point in the narrative, Michel is only beginning to guess at the potential of his own physicality and to (silently, cautiously) acknowledge his own hidden (homo)sexuality; he first begins to process and understand his body and desire in the water of the oasis. The land, then, epitomizes a body, a health, an eroticism that is stifled and contained in Europe, notably in France. It is the opposite and enemy of Western civilization.

When Bachir licks his wound, he divulges to Michel two 'truths' about the Orient: it is wild in the sense that it is healthy, vigorous, free-flowing. But it is also manipulative, seductive. This scene with Bachir anticipates Humbert's seemingly preposterous assertion that it was Lolita who had seduced him; it is a scene of the daring child, here the beautiful boy, who shows Michel his willingness to lick the symbolic phallus and joyfully swallow its excretions. This is the ineffable promise of the Orient and the reason Michel decides to keep the Arab boys close. These boys indicate, however explicitly, opportunity. Boone argues that even such hinted at or imagined homosexual encounters:

> May precipitate unsettling anxieties of masculinity for male travelers and artists who find both their manhood and their desires unexpectedly called into question. Insofar as gender identity is constitutive of individual subjectivity, the denaturalization of masculinity – regardless of the subject's sexual orientation – may also trigger a larger crisis of identity itself. This process can be traced in countless journeys of self-discovery – André Gide's *L'Immoraliste* […] – where the dissolution of the coherent self ends in unnerving (and sometimes ecstatic) experiences of self-estrangement, in which one is no longer legible to oneself, much less to one's home culture.[507]

This anxiety accounts for Michel's sexual equivocation; he cannot commit, at least not in words, to a 'fixed' sexuality. He cannot admit his own homosexuality or pedophilia. Part of this lies in the fact that the self-discovery Michel makes does not translate to his life in France, where he

[506] *The Immoralist.* Pg. 24.
[507] *The Homoerotics of Orientalism.* Pg. 16-17.

continues to dissemble, to (ineffectually) play the part of patriarch. This new libidinal self is confined to the Orient, where he quietly, carefully voices his dissidence. Robert Fagley sees this same sexual equivocation in Gide. He explains, "His extensive travels, especially throughout North Africa, brought Gide a new realization of diverse sexual identities. This is a common theme in many of his novels, in which male characters are often portrayed as ambiguous sexual beings."[508] Here one can again employ the metaphor of the oasis, for the Orient also allows for movement, fluidity, in sexual orientation(s), gender(s), which there need not be viewed as fixed or binary.

The flowing (circulatory, transformative) oasis is contrasted with the desert, to which Michel returns at the denouement of the novella. But, first the desert, to the same extent the oasis is shown to exist in Bachir, is evidenced as inherent in Michel. When recovering from tuberculosis, soon after Bachir cuts his thumb on the floor of Michel's room, Michel suffers another hemorrhage. He recalls:

> A few hours later [after Bachir has left], I had a hemorrhage. It happened while I was walking laboriously on the veranda; Marceline was busy in her room; luckily she could see nothing. Feeling out of breath, I inhaled more deeply than usual, and suddenly it came. It filled my mouth…but it wasn't a flow of bright blood now, like the other hemorrhages; it was a thick, hideous clot I spat onto the floor with disgust.[509]

Michel's blood clot represents immobility. It is the sedentary lifelessness that until this point has marked and marred his existence. We can see the hemorrhage as the embodiment of sublimation, instinctual modification; it is the (primal) blood that once flowed freely but now gathers upon itself with nowhere to move. Michel observes, "The blood was ugly, blackish – something slimy, hideous. I thought of Bachir's beautiful, quick-flowing blood."[510] The Orient, then, is itself a contradiction: it is life and death, movement and stagnation.

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[508] Fagley, Robert M. "Narrating (French) Masculinities: Building Male Identity in André Gide's *The Immoralist.*" *The Journal of Men's Studies.* Vol. 14, No. 1, 2006. Pg. 81.
[509] *The Immoralist.* Pg. 24-25.
[510] *Ibid.* Pg. 25.

Upon his return to Paris, Michel commends barbarism in his lectures on the Goths, for in the Germanic tribe he identifies a (primitive, unsublimated) authenticity lacking among the bourgeoisie. One would think that Michel's adherence to the primitive, even in France, would take the place of morality, pervading not merely his lectures, but also his thoughts and behaviors. But Michel, throughout the novella, remains ambivalent, unable to commit. When in France, he too assumes the posture of a Western Orientalist, tacitly ostracizing and othering the foreign.

During their stay in La Morinière, Michel becomes captivated by the workers hired to clear the trees from his property. He admits, "I pretended to be overseeing their work, but in truth saw only the workmen."[511] It is their perceived foreignness, the extent to which they evoke the Orient, that first beguiles him. When the workers begin to sing a song in Spanish, Michel is transported back to the place of his sexual awakening: "I cannot describe the effect that song produced on me," he muses, "for I had heard its like only in Africa."[512] But his beguilement does not last. Although he tries to assimilate with the foreign workers, initially lauding their crassness, he soon reveals his own internalization of the myths of the Orient and imagined savagery of the other. He intermittently sneaks away from Marceline at night to partake in the workers' poaching of La Morinière. In doing so, he of course flouts his own authority, but he also dissimulates, masking his position of power under the pretense of belonging - even in his native country, on his childhood estate – to the Orient. It is not long, however, before the crassness of the workers loses its appeal. The foreign workers prove too different from, too other than, Michel. In them, he perceives the superiority of his own Western cultivation, his own refinement.

When during one of Michel's poaching adventures, he snares Alcide, the foreman Bocage's unruly son, he sees not a trapped boy, but a cornered animal: "He was a nasty-looking boy, green-eyed, towheaded, weasel-faced. He gave me a couple of kicks and then, immobilized, tried to bite my hands; when that proved futile he began pouring out a stream of the most extraordinary abuse I had ever heard."[513] In this animalization of the foreign, Michel redraws the Orientalist line between East and West. The boy is not human, but weasel-faced, and like a weasel, he is wild, vicious and

[511] *Ibid.* Pg. 125.
[512] *Ibid.* Pg. 126.
[513] *Ibid.* Pg. 129.

unpredictable. He *bites*. In his description of the child, Michel retracts his laudation of the primitive and instead dehumanizes otherness. He observes the child from a Western perspective, from the position of power he can both abandon and return to at will. And like an Orientalist scholar he dedicates his affiliation with the poachers, and his own continued poaching, to learning more about them, to studying them. He enthusiastically recalls, "Was this the means by which I could learn more about this savage family? With what passion I continued poaching!"[514] Michel holds this variable position of infiltration and separation, participation and observation, throughout the novel. When he and Marceline retrace their honeymoon trip through the Orient, Michel, seemingly indifferent to her illness, again steals away in the night. Only now, on this trip, he surely hopes to find adventure, authenticity and, unlike at La Morinière, intimacy. On his way back from a day trip to the mosque in Kairouan, he infiltrates, participates in, Tunisian 'culture' by spending the night with a band of presumably dispossessed locals: "Just as I was returning to the hotel, I remembered a group of Arabs I had noticed lying in the open air on the mats of a little café. I went and slept among them. I returned covered in vermin."[515] Alas, the Orient, for all its promises of freedom, *movement*, also stagnates and occludes. This is the desert.

MacKenzie aptly notes that the end of the novella reflects Michel's dismissal of the orderliness that once defined his (French, imperial) existence. Instead, she argues, he moves "even further into what might be termed the 'dirtier' elements of the world in which he locates and defines himself. His desire leads him deeper into the streets, the darkness, and the dirt."[516] This is the antithesis of the oasis; this is where the lost, the forlorn, come to die. Once Michel realizes this, his experiment with freedom is over. He summons his (French, imperial) friends and asks to be taken away. As it turns out, the Orient is nothing more than an illusion, a desert mirage.

This is made apparent when, just after his trip to Kairouan, Michel reconnects with the Arab boy Agib in Biskra, who, since Michel's last visit to Algeria, has grown into not only a man but a successful butcher and businessman. Michel is miffed to see the way in which Agib now snubs the boys with whom he once played as a child. His position of authority, Michel notices, has made

[514] *Ibid.* Pg. 131.
[515] *Ibid.* Pg. 159.
[516] "The Language of Excitation in Gide's *L'Immoraliste.*" Pg. 316.

him pompous, a homegrown Orientalist differentiating himself from his brethren. Michel laments, "How stupid respectability makes a man! Would I find among these boys just what I most hated at home?"[517] Michel's haughty assessment of Agib reflects two important inevitabilities: first, power, regardless of who exercises it, corrupts. Feelings of superiority and entitlement are not native to Westerners, but inherent in those who dominate and control others. This means the odious man of principle, rather than being the product of French pretentiousness, is ubiquitous; he exists everywhere. Second, even the *beautiful boys*, the potential catamites, grow up to be men. In this, even they, the unspoken promise of the Orient, inevitably disappoint.

In *The Immoralist* we see multiple distinctions (between the primitive East and civilized West, the flowing oasis and static desert, the eroticized young and decrepit old) that highlight the sexual and social incongruities of the foreign. We see that the Orient is not a location to be understood, but a mystery to be explored, exploited and abandoned. But because it is not so much a place as a mirage, the Orient knows no geographical boundaries. For this reason, associations of the foreign, the primitive, can be internalized and projected anywhere, even in the civilized West. Although neither *Lolita* nor *Sabbath's Theater* has been read, at least as far as I know, through a postcolonial lens, it is not a stretch to say that each of the novels builds on, or alludes to, ideas of the eroticized foreign.

In fact, in *Lolita* we find very explicit references to Orientalism, including direct nods to André Gide and the disreputable, perhaps Freudian, early ethnographers who had (inadvertently) created the Orient in the hollow name of science to begin with. When Humbert's first wife Valeria leaves him for another man, Humbert learns that the couple had been taken as paid subjects in an experiment. The tale Humbert tells is of course comical and would seem to further undermine his reliability as a narrator. It is outrageous. But I would argue that it intentionally speaks to the notions of foreignness Humbert later comes to embody. He recalls:

> A man from Pasadena told me one day that Mrs. Maximovich née Zborovski had died in childbirth around 1945; the couple had somehow got over to California and had been used there, for an excellent salary, in a year-long experiment conducted by a distinguished American ethnologist. The experiment dealt with

[517] *The Immoralist.* Pg. 161.

> human and racial reactions to a diet of bananas and dates in a constant position on all fours. My informant, a doctor, swore he had seen with his own eyes obese Valechka and her colonel, by then gray-haired and also quite corpulent, diligently crawling about the well-swept floors of a brightly lit set of rooms (fruit in one hand, water in another, mats in a third and so on) in the company of several other hired quadrupeds, selected from indigent and other helpless groups. I tried to find the results of these tests in the *Review of Anthropology*; but they appear not to have been published yet. These scientific products take of course time to fructuate. I hope they will be illustrated with good photographs when they do get printed, although it is not likely that a prison will harbor such erudite works.[518]

There are obviously a lot of things happening here. First and foremost, the story serves to make light of, and thus to undermine, the seriousness of the experiment and the narrator detailing it. Here Humbert is projecting; he is casting the stereotypes of the Orient (the bananas, the dates, the animality) onto the two people who have most wronged him. It is no surprise that he renders his ex-wife obese and her lover gray-haired, corpulent. This is revenge. But he is also critiquing the concept of Orientalism and the *objective, uninvested* study of the foreign. His story is cleverly, incisively tongue-in-cheek: the so-called expert conducting the laughable experiments is a distinguished American, a Westerner, and the witness to the experiments, Humbert's informant, bears the ultimate title of credibility in that they are indeed a *doctor.* The group being experimented upon is not indigenous, but indigent. This is Nabokov playing, as he does, with words. The terms are false cognates (like ethnology/ethnography) used evoke the Orient in what can be seen as the epitome of the (American) West and the mythical endpoint of *Manifest Destiny*: California.

Valeria and her lover are not indigenous; they do not belong to a primitive or native culture. However, they are other than, lesser than, in that they are impoverished. They are in need of saving. Placing them not only in a primitive but an animal state, on all fours no less, shows the way in which the East has been categorically dehumanized under the pretense of academic research. We can conclude that the *Review of Anthropology* is not an unbiased but an implicitly discriminatory journal; its aim is not to make connections or to uncover some universal truth about humankind, but to ostracize, to abject. The photographs Humbert hopes to appear in the journal are surely the

[518] Nabokov, Vladimir. *Lolita.* New York: Everyman's Library, 1992. Pg. 32.

result of his own boyhood reading of the foreign, the Orient (picture mid-century *National Geographic*). He is again projecting, but his projections are rooted in a shared knowledge, in shared assumptions, of otherness.

Humbert's understanding of Orientalism exceeds his mocking account of ethnographic research and his exaggerated description of Valeria and her now prostrate lover. Indeed, he also sees himself as a metaphor for the Orient: he is the foreign defiler of virtue and of America's innocent youth who cannot be contained through appeals to a common morality. He is not one of us, but one of them, the embodiment of the East. When premediating his eventual violation of Lolita, Humbert imagines himself the face of the Muslim miscreant, the dreaded Turk:

> I entered a plane of being where nothing mattered, save the infusion of joy brewed within my body. What had begun as a delicious distension of my innermost roots became a glowing tingle which *now* had reached that state of absolute security, confidence and reliance not found elsewhere in conscious life. […] I had ceased to be Humbert the Hound, the sad-eyed degenerate cur clasping the boot that would presently kick him away. I was above the tribulations of ridicule, beyond the possibilities of retribution. In my self-made seraglio, I was a radiant and robust Turk, deliberately, in the full consciousness of his freedom, postponing the moment of actually enjoying the youngest of his slaves.[519]

The passage is of course especially pertinent to this inquiry in that it connects the idea of the Orient to the masculinist quest for freedom. Because the Orient as the eroticized foreign is said, or at least thought, to offer limitless opportunities for sexual awakening and non-normative (homosexual, pedophilic) intercourse, Humbert envisages himself beyond the periphery of the moral social structure that would demand retribution for the violation of a minor. In this, he recasts not only himself but his surroundings by projecting them not onto but into the East. He is the authoritative, yes-saying figure of a dissolute culture that condones rape by stripping its devalued, execrated adolescents of subjectivity. In this dark fantasy, Humbert has rights to Lolita, rights to her body as object, commodity. He is not breaking the law; he is the law.

[519] *Ibid.* Pg. 63.

Humbert continues to use the accepted disparity between East and West as evidence of the unfixedness of morality. The effectiveness of this strategy lies in his ability to exaggerate and incite; he must turn Western virtue on its head to show that it is not in itself necessary or even good, to demonstrate that it too is subject to scrutiny. To accomplish this, he reproves by aligning himself with the very foundation upon which Western morality is built: the origin story of Christianity. After he has devised and begun to enact his plan to reach (touch, penetrate) Lolita by marrying her mother, Humbert dissociates from his recurrent feelings of incertitude and (preemptive) contrition by identifying not as the barbaric Turk but as Christianity's, and therefore morality's, first man:

> So Humbert the Cubus schemed and dreamed - and the red sun of desire and decision (the two things that create a live world) rose higher and higher, while upon a succession of balconies a succession of libertines, sparkling glass in hand, toasted the bliss of past and future nights. Then, figuratively speaking, I shattered the glass, and boldly imagined (for I was drunk on those visions by then and underrated the gentleness of my nature) how eventually I might blackmail – no, that is too strong a word – mauvemail big Haze into letting me consort with little Haze by gently threatening the poor doting Big Dove with desertion if she tried to bar me from playing with my legal stepdaughter. In a word, before such an Amazing Offer, before such a vastness and variety of vistas, I was as helpless as Adam at the preview of early Oriental history, miraged in his apple orchard.[520]

The imagery Humbert employs is indisputable: the red, presumably desert, sun; the balconies, the *verandas*; the libertines - a term suggestive of the conflation of Eastern degeneracy and Western decadence; the glass that of course symbolizes the (translucent, breakable) barrier between the civilized and primitive that Humbert himself shatters. Each of these images serves to prepare us for the obfuscation, realized through the figurative transformation of 'black' to 'mauve,' of moral boundaries. Once he has established the tenuousness of the line between right and wrong, East and West, Humbert again assumes the (Oriental? patriarchal?) position of authority that allows him to bully his wife into submission. He is ready to force her, with threats of departure, abandonment, to give her daughter up to him. In this delusion, she has no power to exert; she, like her female

[520] *Ibid.* Pg. 75.

child, belongs to him. He intimates that this temptation to take what is there, to grab hold of and bite into the proverbial apple, is not unique to him but inherent in man. He is the 'old Adam' Michel hopes to resurrect in himself, the epitome of Christian inconsistency, alternately obedient and disobedient, (Middle) Eastern and Western. But the orchard in which he resides, the potential realm of pleasure, is decidedly Oriental, its vistas foreign. Because of this, Humbert's delusion of possessing and managing a harem does not last. After all, he has neither patriarchal freedom nor absolute authority. He is a man on the run in the streets of America.

After Charlotte, the big Haze, is killed and Humbert gains access to the legal stepdaughter he desires, the impossibility of his situation becomes apparent. He, unlike Michel, is not in the Orient but in the metaphorical heart of the West. In conservative America, the arbitrariness of morality as a justification for transgression is not tenable. In America, at least on a superficial level, the rules are rigid, especially regarding the sexual violation of minors. Humbert therefore finds himself in a hostile environment. While on the road with Lolita, he hopes to capitalize on their (roguish, uncontainable) roaming, but instead finds the consummation of outdoor intercourse continually thwarted. Even the American landscape seems proscriptive, no-saying. When he attempts open-air intimacy with the stepdaughter whose affection he believes to deserve, the environment itself rebels against him. In a scene that reminds us of Humbert's interrupted tryst with Annabel, he redraws the line between the eroticized foreign, now projected on the 'Old World mountainsides,' and the prickly, priggish terrain of the American wilds. Of nearly being discovered out in the open, Humbert recollects:

> The disappointment I must now register (as I gently grade my story into an expression of the continuous risk and dread that ran through my bliss) should in no wise reflect on the lyrical, epic, tragic but never Arcadian American wilds. […] Innumerable lovers have clipped and kissed on the trim turf of old-world mountainsides, on the innerspring moss, by a handy, hygienic rill, on rustic benches under the initiated oaks, and in so many *cabanes* in so many beech forests. But in the Wilds of America the open-air lover will not find it easy to indulge in the most ancient of crimes and pasttimes.[521]

[521] *Ibid.* Pg. 178.

In this passage we of course witness the contrast between the Orient and the West, which here serves to delineate between places in which sex, perhaps even deviant sex, is deemed either permissible, unremarkable, or taboo. For Humbert, this distinction is rooted in a desire, maybe a compulsion, to engage in outdoor intercourse. I would argue that the reason for this is twofold: the most obvious explanation was covered in the previous chapter, namely, that Humbert wishes to reincarnate Annabel in Lolita. Because of this, he needs to recreate things as they were when he was an enraptured boy on the seemingly enchanted coast of the Riviera. At that time, he and Annabel had no room in which to conceal themselves, no bed in which to consummate their desire. Their world of play was therefore created in the open air in which they, like Humbert and Lolita, were bound to be discovered. The risk of being caught in an outdoor tryst is therefore part of Humbert's reconstruction of the past.

But, on a more theoretical level, the outdoors, especially the wilderness, represents the antithesis of a civilization marked by walls, barriers, and closed-off spaces. In this civilization it is possible to lock doors, to hide away, but having to do so speaks to its prohibitive nature, to its implementation of unfreedom. Outdoor sex, then, is not merely an act of desperation (when there are no accessible rooms and beds), but an act of rebellion. It is the masculinist endeavor to subvert the authority symbolized in the constrictive walls of civilization and be free. This is why Michel chooses to sleep outside among the Tunisian locals rather than in his hotel with his wife and why Sabbath and Drenka rendezvous in an outdoor grotto. Doing so suggests the utter abandonment of civilization, the (muted, hopeless) cry for freedom. If Humbert finds it difficult to 'indulge in the most ancient crimes and pasttimes' in the Wilds of America, it is because morality has infiltrated and infused the outdoors; even the woods are watching, condemning. As he observes, America is no Arcadia…

It is no wonder then that Humbert eventually gives up his doomed quest for freedom and instead undermines morality via dissemblance. As Lolita gets older and becomes more independent and less governable, Humbert realizes that he, they, cannot commit to a life on the run. But even as they reintegrate into civilization through Lolita's placement at Beardsley, images of the Orient continue to haunt and taunt Humbert. During his first meeting with the headmistress of the school,

which was already partially detailed in the previous chapter on polymorphous perversity, Ms. Pratt presents Humbert with her explicitly anti-Orientalist pedagogy:

> Dr. Hummer, do you realize that for the modern pre-adolescent child, medieval dates are of less vital value than weekend ones [twinkle]? – to repeat a pun that I hear the Beardsley college psychoanalyst permit herself the other day. We live not only in a world of thoughts, but also in a world of things. Words without experiences are meaningless. What on earth can Dorothy Hummerson care for Greece and the Orient with their Harems and slaves?[522]

Ms. Pratt, again voicing Humbert's internalized remorse and fear, notes that American girls like Lolita are less concerned with historical dates than romantic dating. Humbert knows the importance of socialization, but, at least initially, sees Beardsley as a more traditional place of learning. Ellen Pifer observes that, even before her enrollment, "with her bad manners and juvenile clichés, the real Lolita offends Humbert's good taste and continental elegance," noting that if "Lolita is the victim of American pop culture, she is even more cruelly the victim of Humbert's aesthetic proclivities."[523] These aesthetic, pretentious proclivities explain why he would place more importance on her cultivation than her socialization. In his mind, she is not meant to be American at all…

But while he seems to realize that his actions have robbed Lolita, an otherwise typical American girl, of a typical American childhood, he also sees that the more social she becomes with others, the more distant she will grow from him. This represents a difficult conundrum. Brian D. Walter notes that Lolita (understandably) becomes estranged, aloof, after Humbert violates her at the Enchanted Hunters. He, who was once the "handsome, exotic lodger in the Haze home" is now the vile debauchee she "grows to hate."[524] When he rapes her, they leave the realm of fantasy and play; their game, his calculations and her daring, cease to be fun. Furthermore, the world they enter at Beardsley no longer allows him to project; he cannot play the Turk, the tyrant, the slave-owner.

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[522] *Ibid.* Pg. 188.
[523] Pifer, Ellen. *Nabokov and the Novel.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980. Pg. 272.
[524] Walter, Brian D. "Romantic Parody and the Ironic Muse in *Lolita.*" *Essays in Literature.* Vol. 22, No. 1, 1995. Pg. 3.

Instead, he must traverse this new moral landscape, with its disavowals of harems and slaves, as Lolita's dutiful father. He must feign interest in her emergent social/sexual existence while masking his own sexual identity.

What Humbert finds most unfair about this predicament is that the French teacher Gaston Godin, whom I have said mirrors Gide, has somehow managed to construct and people the Orient within the walls of Beardsley. He, unlike Humbert, is able to utilize his foreignness to charm and to trick the Americans. Humbert complains:

> Neighbors pampered him; he knew by name all the small boys in our vicinity (he lived a few blocks away from me) and had some of them clean his sidewalk and burn leaves in his backyard, and bring wood from his shed, and even perform simple chores around the house, and he would feed them fancy chocolates, with *real* liqueurs inside – in the privacy of an orientally furnished den in his basement, with amusing daggers and pistols arrayed on the moldy, rug-adorned walls among the camouflaged hot-water pipes. Upstairs he had a studio – he painted a little, the old fraud. He had decorated its sloping wall (it was really not much more than a garret) with large photographs of pensive André Gide, Tchaikovsky, Norman Douglas, two other well-known English writers, Nijinsky (all thighs and fig leaves), Harold D Doublename (a misty-eyed left-wing professor at a Midwestern university and Marcel Proust.[525]

As mentioned, the character is clearly based at least partially on Gide, the French scholar with a penchant for byzantine artifacts and young boys. Godin's adherence to the East is evident in the above passage with its references to Oriental rugs and weaponry and the intoxicating sweets Godin offers the children. He is an erudite pedophile who likely sees himself a pederast and the Orient, even when self-made, a safe space for the sexual instruction and corruption of minors. To further connect him to Gide, Godin is shown to have visited, and likely frequented, North Africa:

> *Gros* Gaston, in his prissy way, had liked to make presents – presents just a prissy wee bit out of the ordinary, or so he prissily thought. Noticing one night that my box of chessmen was broken, he sent me next morning, with a little lad of his, a copper case: it had an elaborate Oriental design over the lid and could be securely

[525] *Lolita.* Pg. 192.

> locked. One glance sufficed to assure me that it was one of those cheap money boxes called for some reason 'luizettas' that you buy in Algiers and elsewhere, and wonder what to do with afterward.[526]

The gift reveals the extent to which Godin has brought the Orient with him to America. He is showing Humbert that he has gained some level of autonomy within the rigid moral structure of Beardsley by way of subterfuge; his sundry collections and esoteric offerings create the illusion that he is merely eccentric, traveled. He is not only a man of the world who can be trusted with children, but a man whose wisdom children would be fortunate to share. He is not a pedophile, but a cosmopolitan. This is the ruse Humbert himself cannot enact and the reason he so resents prissy Godin. With no other viable card to play, Humbert resorts to attacking Godin's homosexual proclivities, turning him into a caricature of gay decadence.

In the latter part of the penultimate excerpt, Godin is cast as a stereotype of the homosexual, campy decadent. He paints in a garret, the cliched attic room of the destitute artist, which he decorates with the visages of some of the more famous, and more brilliant, homosexual writers, academics and performers, of course including Gide himself. But Humbert finds the gesture contrived, fraudulent. It is no wonder then that he (re)creates Godin's demise, with exaggerated sympathy, in his memoir: "I am loathe to dwell so long on the poor fellow (sadly enough, a year later, during a voyage to Europe, from which he did not return, he got involved in a *sale histoire*, in Naples of all places!)."[527] Here the placement of the parentheses is telling. They separate the general 'poor fellow' from the specific Orientalist, again presumably Gide, whose end he imagines not only en route to the fabled East, but en route to Naples, the two-time pit stop of Michel's wayward journey. We know Humbert is again projecting, as he did with Valeria and her lover; he is thinking up, not unlike Dante did with his nemeses, the ways in which he would punish Godin and seeing them through in writing. This is again revenge. But this is also the Orient exposed; we can assume that the *sale histoire* involved the Frenchman and a young boy.

Even in *Sabbath's Theater*, a novel to some extent about a recalcitrant American Jew – about the distinct Americanness of the recalcitrant Jew, we find allusions to the idea that the Orient can be

[526] *Ibid.* Pg. 228.
[527] *Ibid.* Pg. 194.

visited or projected. Because the Orient is less a place than a vision of the eroticized foreign, it can be seen as a manifestation of deviant desire as such. Sabbath's first recognizes the foreign as a potential locus of pleasure when, after Morty's death, he goes to sea, signs up for the Romance Run:

> In 1946, at seventeen, instead of waiting a year to be drafted, Sabbath went to sea only weeks after graduating high school, he was motivated as much by his need to escape his mother's tyrannical gloom – and his father's pathetic brokenness – as by an unsatisfied longing that had been gathering force in him since masturbation had all but taken charge of his life, a dream that overflowed in scenarios of perversity and excess but that he now, in a seaman's suit, was to encounter thigh-to-thigh, mouth-to-mouth, face-to-face: the worldwide world of whoredom, the tens of thousands of whores who parked the docks and the portside saloons wherever ships made anchor, flesh of every pigmentation to furnish every conceivable pleasure, whores who in the substandard Portuguese, French and Spanish spoke the scatological vernacular of the gutter.[528]

Sabbath's dream of the Orient, the 'scenarios of perversity and excess,' lead him to the foreign ports that, like North Africa, have turned the degeneracy of the Western traveler (here, the storied sailor) into a profitable market. Because of this, the satiation of Sabbath's wayward desire is met; there are enough and as varied prostitutes to 'furnish every conceivable pleasure,' to accommodate every fetish and perversion. Both the multifariousness and the apparent cultural/linguistic inferiority of the Orient is here evidenced in the lingua franca used by the whores whose 'scatological vernacular of the gutter' evokes the dirt and filth of the primitive. Even their language is crude and unrefined.

But this is why masculinism has always at least entertained the idea of the Orient. Because it sees civilization as antagonistic toward artistic and sexual freedom, essentially toward that for which it stands, masculinism is of course inherently hostile toward morality and moralism. The Orient contrasts with, is the opposite of, civilization: it is (thought to be) primitive, uncultured, *dirty*; but, it is also thought to offer limitless possibilities. This limitlessness is enabled through its indifference to the prescripts of Western morality, which masculinism, however accurately, sees

[528] Roth, Philip. *Sabbath's Theater.* New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995. Pg. 81.

as a kind of freedom. The reality that the actual places onto which the Orient is projected have their own social structures and moral codes does not matter; it is their otherness combined with the exteriority of the Orientalist, or masculinist, that creates the illusion of latitude for which such places are infiltrated and exploited.

In Godin we saw the extent to which the Orient could be *(re)created in* the West. But we can also look at things from a different perspective, namely, that the Orient, as a vision, dream, and desire, is *inherent to* the West. After all, there are no truly homogenous Western societies, and the country in which both *Lolita* and *Sabbath's Theater* take place has been multicultural and multilingual since its so-called discovery. America (itself a polemical term) in fact prides itself in being the amalgamation of various ethnic groups, the proverbial melting pot and democratic leveler of opportunity. Cultural diversity, however, does not prevent the assimilated foreign from being either othered or eroticized within its borders. In fact, much of Sabbath's exteriority, a concept we will further explore in just a moment, stems from his internalized feelings of otherness: he is at once American and Jewish, assimilated and alienated. His position is that of an outsider, a kind of domestic exile. This outsider status is requisite to the masculinist quest for freedom in that it, at least theoretically, facilitates detachment and isolation. It enables him to navigate if not freely then at least purposefully; he knows, or thinks he knows, what he is looking for and where to find it.

Interesting is the way in which Sabbath seems to seek out, rather than to (re)create, the foreign *in* America. Drenka, his Croatian 'genital partner,' is perhaps the most obvious example of the foreign. She is the realization of his 'dream of the Orient': the foreign(er) who could not be eroticized, either by Sabbath or by the West, because she was already erotically charged and who could not be exploited because she so relished (Sabbath's and her own) sexual exploits. When Drenka and Sabbath first become lovers, she admits to being sexually experienced in Croatian and wanting to become so in American: "I have learned to do it [have sex] in Croatian, to say all the words and not be shy, but never anyone has taught me to do it in American. Tell me! Teach me! Teach me what all the things mean in American!"[529] *Their* relationship, then, is markedly consensual; together, however, they seek out the foreign to eroticize and exploit. This is arguably true of Silvija, Matija's teenage niece who works at the inn during her summers off from college.

[529] *Ibid.* Pg. 40.

Although Drenka and Sabbath never find the opportunity to trick Silvija into bed, they do sneak into her room when she is out; Drenka does try on (and take off) Silvija's Croatian dress and worn undergarments for Sabbath, ultimately *becoming* Silvija for him and giving herself to him in Silvija's bed.

Perhaps the most obvious example of their eroticization and exploitation of the foreign, however, is Sabbath's deception and conditioning of, and Drenka's faked affection for, the German transient, Christa. Sabbath first picks Christa up when she is hitchhiking and slowly, meticulously gains her trust through gently probing questions. He discovers: she is lonely, she is a lesbian, and she has a thing for older women. Eventually, through fastidious questioning and confiding, he is able to arrange a lesbian tryst between Drenka (the 'whore' to whom he pays five hundred dollars) and Christa that leads to an orchestrated, surveilled affair: "For two months, on Wednesday nights, Drenka and Sabbath would go, in separate cars, to lie with Christa in the attic,"[530] her little room on Town Street. On these nights, the women engage in intercourse under Sabbath's careful watch. Soon, however, the young German realizes that she has been taken advantage of, used. "'I don't want to talk to you anymore,'" she announces the Sabbath, "'You two exploited me.'"[531] The twenty-year-old is not wrong.

There are a lot of ways to excavate the Orient in *Sabbath's Theater*, some more reaching than others. Individually, Sabbath's, and Sabbath and Drenka's, exploits seem to speak to a degeneracy untethered to (internalized, projected) notions of the East. Collectively, however, they represent a pattern of locating and sexualizing the foreign in America. Perhaps this pattern stems from Sabbath's boyhood stint on the Romance Run. Or perhaps it stems from the myth of the Orient itself, the idea that there is every conceivable pleasure to be found in the foreign.

Sabbath's first wife, Nikki, is Greek; this is perhaps incidental. I certainly do not mean to imply that all things, all people and characters, Greek necessarily point to intimations of 'Greek love' or pederasty or sexual openness/deviance. Doing so would be both remiss and unproductive. But in this case, Nikki's Greekness hearkens to notions of the Orient; she is literally lost and because of

[530] *Ibid.* Pg. 52.
[531] *Ibid.* Pg. 53.

this she represents Sabbath's lost dream of the Orient. When, near the end of the novel, Sabbath finds himself at the edge of the Atlantic holding Morty's American flag, when he finds himself on the verge of suicide, this dream is momentarily reconjured and then relinquished:

> But from within the carton, Morty's American flag – which I know is folded there, at the very bottom, in the official way – tells me, 'It's against some Jewish law,' and so, on into the car he went with the carton, and then he drove it down to the beach, to the boardwalk, which was no longer there. The boardwalk was gone. Good-bye, boardwalk. The ocean had finally carried it away. The Atlantic is a powerful ocean. Death is a terrible thing. That's a doctor I never heard of. Remarkable. Yes, that's the word for it. It was all remarkable. Good-bye, remarkable. Egypt and Greece good-bye, and good-bye, Rome.[532]

This passage evidences the trajectory of masculinism's conception of the Orient. In Michel, we find a hope in the foreign *in the foreign* that turns to estrangement, desolation. In Humbert, we witness delusions of Turkishness, the exemptive status of the fabled slave-holder, killed by the reality of American convention. Now in Sabbath, at least at the denouement of the novel, we witness a letting go of the dream of the Orient and its promise of pleasure. In this, Nikki, for whom he spends a great deal of time searching, embodies the classical foreignness (Egypt, Greece, Rome) he now sees dissipating, like his childhood boardwalk, like his childhood itself, into the sea. The cultures, the lovers, that once accommodated pleasure are no longer.

At the end of each novel, we see the abandonment of the masculinist quest for freedom. Michel has alas summoned his friends to his austere dwelling of self-exile in Algeria. He has recently buried the wife whose recovery he failed to facilitate. Humbert, so averse to moral confinement, sits in actual confinement. Sabbath longs for a death he proves incapable of achieving. In some ways, the abortion of their quest feels the result of losing those they once loved (or at least claimed to have loved): Marceline and her unborn child; Annabel and Lolita. For Sabbath, the list is longer, less coherent: it is his brother, Morty and his mother whose ghost still torments him. It is Nikki and Linc, and it is of course Drenka. But loss is a mandate for freedom; for it is not until everything

[532] *Ibid.* Pg. 402-403.

has been given up – relationships, possessions, interiority or belonging – that true autonomy can be realized. This is something each of the protagonists seems to have understood.

In his theory of the novel, Georg Lukács uses the phrase 'transcendental homelessness' to describe the modern Western mind of the novelist.[533] Marianna Torgovnick explains that Lukács sees the artist's cognizance as 'transcendentally homeless' in that it is: "secular but yearning for the sacred, ironic, but yearning for the absolute, individualistic but yearning for the wholeness of community, asking questions but receiving no answers, fragmented but yearning for 'immanent totality.'"[534] This homelessness, this futile wandering in search of the ultimate reconciliation of life's countless contradictions is, according to Lukács, part of the modern condition. But this state of restlessness, what Gide calls *inquiétude*, is not limited to the modern, or the postmodern, novelist. Indeed, it is a necessary condition of the masculinist protagonist who cannot, must not, stagnate because he knows settling down would tie him down, impede the movement contingent to his autonomy.

This need for movement can further be connected to ideas of the primitive. In *The Immoralist,* we saw the North African oasis as evidence of life in that it is circulatory, flowing. We saw sedentariness, symbolized in the desert, as an indication of lifelessness, lethargy. In this, and for masculinism, movement is being, a self-assertion in the inanimate world of things, but it, this refusal to settle down, is also a primitive, albeit 'artistic,' nomadism. In their seminal work *Nomadology: The War Machine*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari analyze nomadic groups as stateless, ungovernable, mobile. They argue that these nomads hold a position of exteriority that is often misunderstood, othered, and rendered unintelligent:

> Primitive, segmentary societies have often been defined as societies without a State, meaning societies in which distinct organs of power do not appear. But the conclusion has been that these societies did not reach the degree of economic development, or the level of political differentiation, that would make the formation of the State apparatus both possible and inevitable: the implication is that primitive people 'don't understand' so complex an apparatus.[535]

[533] Cf. Lukács, Georg. *The Theory of the Novel.* Tr. Anna Bostock. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971.
[534] *Gone Primitive.* Pg. 188.
[535] Deleuze, Gilles and Guatarri, Félix. *Nomadology: The War Machine*. Tr. Brian Massumi. Pasadena: Semiotexte, 1986. Pg. 10.

This prevalent (mis)assessment fails to account for either the complexity or the efficiency of these primitive, segmentary societies scaffolded by rhizomatic rather than hierarchal relations. Deleuze and Guatarri note, "Even in bands of animals, leadership is a complex mechanism that does not act to promote the strongest, but rather inhibits the installation of stable powers, in favor of a web of immanent relations. […] Packs, bands, are groups of the rhizome type, as opposed to the arborescent type which centers around organs of power."[536] In *Nomadology,* a contrast between the interiority of State and exteriority of the nomadic bands traversing and thus infiltrating the State's geographical boundaries is established. This presents an interesting theoretical lens through which to further analyze the masculinist endeavor to subvert the moral prescripts of civilization (the State) from the position of a transient social outsider (the nomad).

In this theoretical framework, the knowledge produced by the State is deemed dignified, superior; it is said to be rooted in 'royal science.' In contrast, the knowledge produced by nomadic societies is devalued as 'nomadic, war-machine science.' Its perceived aim is to undercut the State and to eradicate its organs of power. To ensure that the subjects within the State stay contained, controlled, that its 'collective measures of inhibition' are kept in place, the State markets itself as the embodiment of a sovereignty the individual alone cannot achieve. This sovereignty, however, reigns only over "what it is capable of internalizing, or appropriating locally."[537] In other words, it reigns only over those who have been conditioned to adhere to its strictures, over those who feel this internalization, this interiority, to be necessary, innate, universal. Deleuze and Guatarri explain:

> In so-called modern philosophy, and in the so-called modern or rational State, everything revolves around the legislator and the subject. The State must realize the distinction between the legislator and the subject under the formal conditions permitting thought, for its part, to conceptualize their identity. Be obedient, always. The better you obey, the more you will master, for you will only be obeying pure reason, in other words, yourself…[538]

[536] *Ibid.* Pg. 12-13.
[537] *Ibid.* Pg. 15-16.
[538] *Ibid.* Pg. 42-43.

In this, the State portrays itself as the voice of reason, intimating that it does not contain but represent those who, rationally, view its precepts as that which goes without saying, as that which indubitably stands in their best interest. Under the imperceptible influence of the State, identity is not realized, but constructed. The nomad, then, evades this cultural brainwashing from their position of exteriority.

In *Nomadic Subjects,* Rosi Braidotti elaborates this point; she sees nomadism as "a form of resisting assimilation or homologation into dominant ways of representing self."[539] Under this definition, nomadism is intrinsically amoral (even immoral) and connately subversive. It offers an alternative to prescribed truisms, to that which seems to go without saying, in that it is "an opening of new possibilities to life and thought."[540] John Durham Peters links this nomadic freedom of thought back to the notion of (actual or symbolic) mobility. "Nomads," he contends, "liberate thinking from dogmatism, break through convention to new life and beauty, and prize the mobile diversity of being."[541] It is no wonder, then, that masculinism would embrace nomadic exteriority as a precondition of freedom, autonomy, from the patriarchal social structure.

As is by now evident, nomadism can be seen as the (free) movement of thought and/or body within an existing morality. Because we have already identified mental apparatuses of nomadic freedom as dissemblance, dissidence, and rebellion, the rest of this chapter will mostly focus on actual movement, on the masculinist refusal to settle down, as a means to gain exteriority. Although this sort of perpetual motion is of course inspired by actual nomadism, by those transient societies so often deemed primitive and other, here it will be used to hone the theme of retreat as subversion in each work. That said, Deleuze and Guitarri's analysis of nomadology, along with Peters' and Braidotti's clarifying definitions of nomadism, will be used to connect travel, retreat, to the position of exteriority from which the masculinist protagonist is able to circumvent morality. In "Freud's Concepts of Defense and the Poetic Will," Harold Bloom identifies a "trope of flight"[542] that speaks to this (masculinist) compulsion to move, to flee. Victoria Aarons argues that this trope

[539] Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Subjects.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. Pg. 25.
[540] *Ibid.* Pg. 8.
[541] Peters, John Durham. "Exile, Nomadism, and Diaspora: The Stakes of Mobility in the Western Canon." *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media and the Politics of Place.* Ed. Hamid Nagicy. New York: Routledge, 1999. Pg. 33.
[542] Bloom, Harold. "Freud's Concepts of Defense and the Poetic Will." *The Literary Freud: Mechanisms of Defense and the Poetic Will.* Ed. Joseph H. Smith. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980. Pg. 5.

is especially evident in Roth's always dissolute protagonists: "So characteristic of Roth's reluctant Jews, when their defenses no longer protect them from themselves, their response is to retreat. […] Ironically, Roth's characters typically engage in strategic forms of aggressive retreat. They retreat, more often than not, through disingenuous claims to autonomy; they run from themselves."[543] The narrator of *Sabbath's Theater* does not attempt to deny this argument, but instead confirms: "Everything runs away, beginning with who you are, and at some indefinable point you come to half understand that the ruthless antagonist is yourself."[544] But Sabbath's eventual understanding that he is running from himself does not put an end to his retreat.

For Sabbath (as with masculinist protagonists in general), flight is inherent in the artist, the creative freethinker, who above all values autonomy. When he was still admired if not always liked by New York's theater and performance savants, Sabbath had a bright future ahead of him with his notoriously indecent Indecent Theater. Then, at the height of his success, he exposes the breast of one of the members of his audience and in so doing derails his career, reputation and financial security. One might think that his subsequent flight were from shame or even remorse. But this is clearly not the case. I would argue that his self-subversion is intentional. For him, self-restraint equates self-betrayal. He must push and provoke. And, ultimately, he must move away from proscriptive morality and toward isolation:

> His cockiness, his self-exalted egoism, the mincing charm of a potentially villainous artist were insufferable to a lot of people and he made enemies easily, including a number of theater professionals who believed that his was an unseemly, brilliantly disgusting talent that had yet to discover a suitably seemly means of 'disciplined' expression. Sabbath Antagonistes, busted for obscenity as far back as 1956. Sabbath Absconditus, whatever happened to him? His life was one big flight from what?[545]

Flight, for Sabbath, is of course an attempted escape from self; but, more specifically, it is an escape from one of his performing selves, from the self who might be tempted to conform, to

[543] Aaron, Victoria. "American-Jewish Identity in Roth's Short Fiction." *The Cambridge Companion to Philip Roth.* Ed. Timothy Parrish. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pg. 17.
[544] *Sabbath's Theater.* Pg. 111.
[545] *Ibid.* Pg. 125.

discover a more disciplined means of expression to appease the theater professionals, to stay committed in his relationships, to settle down. It seems it is when morality tightens its grip that Sabbath retreats, slips on a new skin, but it is also when he has the most to lose that he throws everything away. This is freedom.

In this, his is a flight toward disorder, instability. It is not surprising, then, that when his world collides with Nikki's, there are casualties, losses. For they are both on the run, but they are not running toward but through each other. Nikki is in flight toward order, stability, toward that from which Sabbath retreats. On the run from men, she runs into Sabbath:

> '[…] She [Nikki] fled Russia to elude the consequences of her disastrous marriage; she flees Paris to leave behind the disastrous affair. A woman in flight from disorder. In *flight* from disorder, Nikoleta. Yet she carries the disorder within her – she is the disorder!' But I was the disorder. I am the disorder.[546]

Because Sabbath's schtick is to cause chaos and to unsettle convention, he cannot help but unsettle Nikki, too. Drenka seems the only one capable of surviving his tumultuousness. Drenka and Sabbath, unlike Sabbath and Nikki, are on the same path, headed in the same direction: they are fleeing their marriages in search of sexual (mis)adventure. Although neither leaves Madamaska Falls in the time they are together, they do find ways in which to bypass society and social normativity. They retreat to the grotto, to Christa's attic room, to each other. Their relationship becomes a kind or organized chaos; they are spiraling but spiraling synchronously. It is after Drenka dies that Sabbath again physically flees. But here flight is not just from self, but from unforeseen, unbearable, loss. For Sabbath, such retreat represents a traceable pattern of behavior: he goes to sea in the wake of Morty's death; he leaves New York when Nikki disappears; then, when Drenka dies, he abandons his wife and home in Madamaska Falls. But this time his flight is not collinear but circular; this time, he is looping back around, returning home.

This impulse to return home, to return to the safety of the mother and the womb, is the crux of Freud's nirvana principle in which death is pinpointed as an instinctual goal. Toward the end of

[546] *Ibid.* Pg. 203.

the novel, Sabbath begins to realize that his longing for his mother is indeed a desire for death. After Drenka dies, he begins to retrace his steps, first going back to New York then to his childhood home and, fittingly, to his family plot at the Jewish cemetery. It is there that decisive Sabbath finds himself suddenly tentative:

> He didn't know whom he would be depriving of what by walking away after ten minutes of standing there, but he couldn't do it. The repeated leaving and returning did not escape his mockery, but he could do nothing about it. He could not go and he could not go, and then – like any dumb creature who abruptly stops doing one thing and starts doing another and about whom you can never tell if its life is all freedom or no freedom – he could go and he went.[547]

This scene pantomimes the nirvana principle as Sabbath returns to his mother and, in doing so, confronts his own mortality. He circles the plot, the tomb as womb, until Sabbath, the remembering animal, finally walks away. The analogy of the 'dumb creature' whose freedom or unfreedom cannot be determined is particularly fitting to the scene; Sabbath's life had after all been a futile quest to know freedom. And now that he wants to know death, he seems incapable of dying. Herbert Marcuse explains, "The quest for liberation is darkened by the quest for Nirvana."[548] In the final pages of the novel, Sabbath no longer asserts his autonomy in a show, a performance, of noncompliance. He no longer announces his dissidence. Instead, he circles back to Madamaska Falls, where his nomadic exteriority, his severing of all connection, has left him not free but alone and in want of an end he cannot achieve.

This cyclical movement, this endless leaving and returning, is of course also an obvious motif in *The Immoralist.* This nomadic theme is in fact foreshadowed at near the beginning of the novella, when during his convalescence Michel begins to (re)read Homer's *Odyssey.* The epic covers Odysseus' perilous journey home after the fall of Troy. Michel recalls:

> I took out of my pocket a little Homer I had not opened since leaving Marseilles, reread three lines of the *Odyssey*, learned them by heart; then, finding sufficient sustenance in their rhythm and reveling in

[547] *Ibid.* Pg. 371.
[548] Marcuse, Herbert. *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1974. Pg. 108.

> them at leisure, I closed the book and remained, trembling, more alive than I had thought possible, my mind numb with happiness.[549]

It seems incongruous that Michel, who just before acknowledges that his primal senses had existed dormant within him throughout all his years of study, throughout his years wasted on books, should now find happiness in a text. It seems he is trying to reconcile two irreconcilable parts of himself, the learned and the unadulterated, except that his reading of the text actually mimics the text. He is not reading the poem in its entirety but rereading three lines again and again. He is circling, journeying. The movement, the rhythm, of the repetition is what feeds him life, fills him with happiness.

On the eve of Gide's death, Ernst Erich Noth writes, "It was particularly encouraging to think him ready for another sip from his patent medicine: travel; another dose of his favorite stimulant: departure."[550] This bit of encouragement that Gide might again travel, depart, speaks to the restlessness, the *inquiétude* and ennui, that he infuses in Michel. We have seen Michel's recurrent need to sneak away at night; while in La Morinière, he admits:

> From far away, in the sleeping house, I seemed to be guided, as though by a calm beacon, by the lamp in my study where Marceline supposed I was working away, or by the night light in Marceline's bedroom. I had persuaded her that without these nocturnal expeditions I could not fall asleep. It was the truth: I despised my bed and would have preferred the barn.[551]

Once he has recovered from tuberculosis and committed to a less sedentary life, he can no longer be contained. He feels summoned outdoors. If he cannot sleep, it is because sleep equates the immobility that in turn equates death. When Marceline falls ill, he drags her through a fast-forwarded repetition of their honeymoon trip. He does this not that she might survive but that he might stay alive (healthy, sensual, free!). He hopes to prolong his life by moving, like the blood in the body, the water in the oasis, in circles. This is his odyssey. During this reverse honeymoon, Michel shortens their stay in the places where Marceline might recover and extends it where he

[549] *The Immoralist.* Pg. 37.
[550] Noth, Erich Ernst. "André Gide." *Books Abroad.* Vol. 25, No. 2, 1951. Pg. 607.
[551] *The Immoralist.* Pg. 133.

might prolong "his vagrant debauch."[552] For Michel, their travels mark a return to what was (altered though the people and places now seem); for Marceline, it is a death voyage she can neither stop nor slow:

> Four days later, we set out again for Sorrento. […] We decided to take a boat to Palermo, whose climate was spoken of so favorably, and went back to Naples, where we were to embark and where we stayed on a few days longer. But in Naples at least I wasn't bored. Naples is a city where the past isn't a tyrant. […] when her [Marceline's] more regular breathing indicated she was asleep, I would noiselessly get up, dress again in the dark and slip out like a thief.[553]

Michel's frenetic relocating from city to city and country to country of course exacerbates Marceline's fragile health. His is a pace it would be difficult for anyone, let alone a convalescent, to keep. In a breathless retelling, Michel confesses: "We left for Taormina for Syracuse. Step by step we were retracing, in reverse, our first journey, turning back toward the dawn of our love. And just as from week to week, during our first journey, I had advanced toward recovery, so from week to week, as we moved southward, Marceline's condition grew worse."[554] Because Michel is aware of but indifferent to Marceline's demise, he has often been accused of narcissism. I would argue that this narcissism, though, enables the distancing he needs to achieve exteriority. He must be self-centered in order to navigate, to move, freely. Properly caring for her, halting their exhaustive travels, would end his nomadic endeavor.

But for Michel, the movement occurs not only between cities and countries, but between streets and alleyways. Boone observes that this is Gide's rendition of the travel narrative: "secret turns in a street, concealed niches in cafes, hidden staircases, and unseen exits become eroticized sites that hold the promise of unnamed, perhaps unnamable, desires that lie on the other side of those thresholds."[555] When he gets up, dresses, and slips out, it is to achieve the sexual freedom that

[552] *Ibid.* Pg. 153.
[553] *Ibid.* Pg. 153.
[554] *Ibid.* Pg. 154-55.
[555] *The Homoerotics of Orientalism.* Pg. 292.

travel to and within the Orient offers. On what comes to be the night of Marceline's death, Michel again leaves her:

> I went out. In front of the hotel door, the square, the streets, the very atmosphere were all so alien that I could scarcely believe what I saw and heard. After a few moments I went back inside. Marceline was sleeping calmly. I had been mistaken to be alarmed; in this fantastic country, dangers seemed to lurk everywhere; it was ridiculous. And, sufficiently reassured, I went out again. How strange the nocturnal animation of the square; a silent traffic – the clandestine gliding of white *burnous.* Every other moment, a burst of strange music vanished on the breeze. Someone came toward me…It was Moktir. He had been waiting for me, he said, and was sure I would come back out. He laughed. He knew Touggourt, came here often, and wanted to take me somewhere. I let him lead me away.[556]

Here the promise of the Orient is hinted at, alluded to, despite Michel's initial misgivings about leaving Marceline. The square is animated; there is a muffled flow of traffic. Robed townspeople slip by and disappear like the strange music surrounding them. There is a mystery, an adventure, around every turn and beyond every threshold. It is here that he is exterior to even when pretending to be part of; it is here that he is a nomad.

Humbert also turns to a life in motion, a life on the road, on the run, in an effort to evade the moral prohibitions against his deviant desire. He recalls:

> It was then that began our extensive travels all over the States. To any other type of accommodation I soon grew to prefer the Functional Motel – clean, neat, safe nooks, ideal places for sleep, argument, reconciliation, insatiable illicit love. […] By and by, the very possibilities that such honest promiscuity suggested (two young couples merrily swapping mates or a child shamming sleep to earwitness primal sonorities) made me bolder, and every now and then I would take a bed-and-cot or twin-bed cabin, a prison cell of paradise, with yellow window shades pulled down to create a morning illusion of Venice and sunshine when it was actually Pennsylvania and rain.[557]

[556] *The Immoralist.* Pg. 165-166.
[557] *Lolita.* Pg. 153.

The American hotel comes to represent the Orient whose rules and regulations are different from those of mainstream culture: you can pay by the hour, request a cot for a guest or a twin for two. It is a place where a grown man can exploit a young child, a place where secrets are kept. Even though, however, Humbert can imagine himself elsewhere (Turkey, Italy), he cannot envision a lifetime on the road. The movement from one motel to another must be slowed, stopped. For although he may have achieved some position of exteriority in his journeying with Lolita, the very fact that he has taken her binds them. His isolation is not his own. She is the reason he must settle near Beardsley, dissemble through a public persona. In this, his nomadism falls short of freedom.

Inasmuch as we can decry these works as exploitative (of the foreign, of children, of women), in them we can also find the almost universal longing for home, acceptance and truth. Their themes are intentionally deplorable; masculinism positions itself in the realm of the amoral (and sometimes of the immoral), because doing so allows it to see, to decipher, the arbitrariness of the social structure in which its protagonists were once embedded and from which they now flee. This is the movement toward a freedom that, though unrealizable, offers perspective, a deeper understanding of the human condition. But it is also a movement that alienates and disillusions.

CONCLUSION: DISSIDENCE AND DISSEMBLANCE

Masculinism, as a literary mode, can here be more explicitly differentiated from its semantic approximates of *masculinity, machismo,* and *manliness*; it can also be separated from its latent connotations of (male) gender and (hetero)sexuality. For inasmuch as the name masculinism would seem to imply an adherence to traditional beliefs about what it means to be male (strong, virile, assertive), it actually serves a more subversive function, undermining the myths of both the fixedness of gender and the iniquity of deviant sexuality. In short, it challenges the system it would seem to uphold through *approximation,* undercutting via resemblance. It has already been noted that masculinism regards transgression as essential to authenticity and that such transgression is often carried out through acts of polymorphous perversity. These acts, because they are not only proscribed but taboo, must then point to freedom from the patriarchal power structure; they must then also indicate the autonomy of the individual and an escape from unfreedom.

The locus of the masculinist's revolt for (sexual, artistic, individual) freedom occurs on the body, whose imperviousness to efforts to sanitize and contain it threatens the social system in which it, the body, is (repeatedly, ceaselessly) sublimated and subjugated. The body is then torn, so to speak, between fleeting moments of liberating pleasure and stifling conformity. It serves both a sexual and social function, the former of which masculinism would, if not denounce entirely, then at least defy partially. The masculinist, you see, is not hung up on ideals of masculinity; he does not see himself as a cog in the machine or a defender of the greater good. He does not comply with herd mentality. He sees the so-called man of principle as a man of convention. Yet, at least as of now, the masculinist is still male; this 'assignment' is what allows him to dissemble, to penetrate the social system he (often furtively) rejects.

It is also what allows him to intermittently distance himself from the maternal aspects of femininity that both beguile and haunt him. He is not overtly masculine (as many might perceive him to be), but tacitly feminine. He is a motherless mama's boy who dapples; he sometimes peacocks, often charades. He is a (transvestite) man at play, whose game has exhilarated him, but also left him listless and forlorn.

He may not remember why he decided to experiment with freedom or flout convention, although he may allude to the Greek assertion of self or his supposedly unique want of independence. He may see himself as an anarchist or anti-Christ or a consummate non-conformist. Or he may, like Nietzsche, see himself as a superhuman who can turn himself to bronze, undermining not only civilization but mortality, time. He may deem himself both above the law and above, or beyond, death. And he is acutely aware that his body is his only way of knowing, either way, what his existence is capable of or limited to. Either way, though, he must know.

But his quest for uncontained sexuality in the (conceivably hollow) name of freedom does not come without cost. Like most quests, it is misled, destined to fail. This is not necessarily because the quest *in itself* cannot be consummated, but because it does not take into account man's inability to see it through. The problem is that freedom is contingent on absolute detachment, and the masculinist is inextricably (though deniably) attached. He *remembers.* And despite his efforts to misinterpret or reinterpret the past, he cannot escape that from which he flees; he cannot escape his interconnectivity.

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